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SAMUEL THE KING MAKER

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SAMUEL, THE KING-MAKER

A Play in Four Acts

by

LAURENCE HOUSMAN



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The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spake to them; and whether they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, and so be the cause of imposition.

Isaiah answered: I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discovered the infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded, and remain confirmed, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell — WILLIAM BLAKE

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INTRODUCTION

BLAKE's discovery of the raw material for prophetic utterance holds good for true prophets and false prophets alike; they all speak for the God that is in them. The true prophet, true to type, speaks for the God of truth; the false prophet, equally true to type, speaks for the God of lies – his own God: in other words, for himself. For ever since the world began man has been a consistent maker of Gods – in his own image.

And so, because Samuel made God in his own image, his indignation against the Children of Israel for asking for a King, and later against Saul for his determination to be a King and not a mere puppet, was very genuine. But that did not make him a true prophet of the Lord; Samuel was only true to himself.

Yet he began well; and even when he did less well, he played a very important part in the history of Israel, for it was his vengeful dividing of Israel against Saul which, seven years after Saul's death, gave first to David and then Solomon the Kingship of a united people; and to that people two Kings of exceptional quality. So, if the result justified the means, Samuel was justified; and according to the Bible narrative all that he did was done in obedience to the word of the Lord.

Are those who call themselves Christians bound to believe it? Does not the moral obligation lie very much in the other direction?

The writers of the historical books of the Old Testament cannot be regarded as impartial historians. They had an axe to grind, and they ground it very industriously; and probably, for the most part, in all good faith that everything they set on record was true. For they were writing the story of 'the Chosen People' of a very tribal Deity, whose care was for them only; for other nations he had no bowels of compassion, and their extermination was, for the Children of Israel, not merely an approved policy, it was a divine command.

It was only natural, therefore, in an age when miracle and material intervention were regarded without question as God's chosen means for making his ways known unto men, and his

saving health unto one nation in particular, that signs and wonders should be the running accompaniment of that nation's history. A God who did not intervene materially would hardly have been a God worth having; even belief in him would have been difficult. And so, when history came to be written, the wonders had not to be invented by the historians; sacred tradition abundantly supplied the material: any event unexpected or catastrophical in character had already received an interventional interpretation; and the greater the wonder (God's power being thereby more fully manifested) the more likely it was to be true.

Under such circumstances one could hardly expect history to be written otherwise. Is there, indeed, any history of an ancient people which is not plentifully larded with miracle? Is there, then, any reason why we should regard the miraculous accretions of Hebraic history as having more truth in them than these others?

But here is the extraordinary fact, that, even to-day, when scholarship has proved beyond doubt the inaccuracy of certain passages in Old Testament history, its miraculous element is still regarded by so many as having a special sanctity; to doubt the accuracy of its numerals, its chronology, or its natural history is permissible – to doubt the truth of its miracles is impious. That feature which, in the ancient history of all other nations we sensibly discard as unworthy of credence, is the very one which – when we come to Bible history – people of misguided piety still try to impose on us. Take, for instance, that most stupendous of all Old Testament miracles – Joshua's command to the sun and the moon to stand still while he finished his defeat of the Amorites; because that quotation from a war-poem is followed up by the affirmation, 'And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man' for many, who are otherwise intelligent, it becomes a matter of faith – the story has got to be believed; and those who refuse to believe it are charged with lack of reverence for the Word of God.

Yet surely the real lack of reverence lies in ascribing such fussy intervention to small ends to the sort of God whom Christians can now worship. We have only to look at the

details of that story to see how superfluous was the miracle – an instance of the incurable megalomania with which Hebrew historians enlarged their victories in battle to incredible proportions, by adding to them incredible features. For before ever Joshua gave command to the sun, the Amorites were already utterly smitten – by the Israelites, ‘with great slaughter’, in the first place, and then with greater slaughter by the Lord himself, by means of a lesser miracle – a storm of hailstones; ‘and there were more which died of the hailstones than those whom the children of Israel slew with the sword’. It is after that utter discomfiture of the enemy, that the solar system has to be disturbed to give it a finer finish; actually, of course, it was not the sun which had to stop, but the rotation of the earth: a terrestrial detail of which the writer of the story was quite unaware.

Now how does all this concern the critical commentary on the life and character of ‘Samuel, the Kingmaker’, which here follows? It concerns it for two reasons: Samuel was the reputed author of the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges – of those portions of them, at least, which were not the product of a later generation; for, like the Book of Samuel and some of the other historical Books of the Old Testament, they are now known to be compilations from various sources of different dates, in which certain lost Books are referred to, and sometimes quoted: the ‘Book of the Wars of Jehovah’ (Numbers XXI, 14) is one; the Book of Jasher, which vouched for Joshua’s miracle of the sun, is another. The title of the former Book, indicates well enough what was already known – that Jehovah was indeed a God of Battles, that he won them mainly by miracle, and that there were very few battles in which he did not intervene against the enemies of Israel, either by ‘vexing them’ in unspecified ways, or thundering at them out of Heaven, or sending upon them darkness or earthquake; and when these larger measures of intervention were not employed he still required preliminary sacrifice, fixed the propitious date, and laid down the conditions for the saving or the destruction of the spoil, and the extermination of whole populations, men, women, and children. For these smaller interventions the mouth of a prophet speaking ‘the word of the

Lord' was the approved medium; and the prophet's word for it, that it was the Word of the Lord, was accepted without question. And that is where Samuel comes in; and in the play which I have written upon that theme, Samuel's credentials are, both for moral and historical reasons, seriously questioned: was he really speaking 'the Word of the Lord', or only the word of Samuel? And if one has good reasons for more than doubting the truth of Joshua's miracle of the sun, may one not have equally good reasons for doubting whether Samuel's 'Word of the Lord' came from the source to which he ascribed it, and whether he was not in fact playing for his own hand, and attributing to a jealous God his own jealousy at being required to give place to another in the ruling of Israel?

Surely for a true reading of Old Testament history, one must be just as free to question the authenticity of its miracles, or the credentials claimed by its prophets, as one is free to question the correctness of its numerals and its chronology.

And that is my second concern. The chronology of that part of the Book of Samuel where it deals with the relations of Saul and Samuel, and later of Saul and David, is not only puzzling, it is sometimes contradictory; the reason being that it is composed of extracts drawn from different sources, and these extracts (not always arranged in proper sequence) give the story, with variations in time and circumstance, which are difficult if not impossible to reconcile. One instance is the double account, under very different circumstances, of the spirit of prophecy coming upon Saul, from which arose the saying 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' In the earlier version Saul, fresh from his anointing as King, meets a company of the prophets, and fulfilling the word of Samuel is, by the power of the Spirit, 'turned into another man', and prophesies with them. In the later version it comes rather as an affliction, falling like a contagious disease not only upon Saul, but upon the three sets of messengers who had preceded him with orders to drag David away from the protection of Samuel. It is a similar story (of a wonder three times repeated) to that of the three companies of fifty with their captains sent by Ahaziah (2 Kings 1, 1-9) to capture Elijah on Mount Horeb; and each company in turn is gobbled up by fire, until, of his own free

will, the prophet goes to the king. Those who are able to believe that story will have no difficulty in believing the other, and may even prefer it to the earlier and simpler one, in which the spirit of prophecy fell upon Saul not derisively (as in this case) but as a confirmation of his kingship.

An instance, where it is still more impossible to accept both accounts as true, is the story of David's two comings to Saul. Of the first (1 Samuel xvi, 17-18) we are told that David was sent for by Saul, as a skilful player upon the harp, to cure him of the evil spirit from the Lord which troubled him; and according to this account Saul knew who David's father was, had sent messengers to him, and had received presents from him; after which David became Saul's musician and armour-bearer, and 'Saul loved him greatly'. But on the second occasion where David comes to Saul as the would-be giant-killer, Saul does not know him, or who his father is, or anything about him; and David says nothing to remind him. In the earlier account, though still a keeper of sheep, David is described as 'a mighty valiant man, a man of war, and prudent in speech'; in the second he is still 'a stripling' and is treated by his brother as a naughty boy for leaving his father's sheep in order to see something of the war; all of which makes nonsense of the suggested explanation by certain commentators that 'the stripling' had so outgrown the youthful looks of 'the mighty valiant man, the man of war', that Saul failed to recognize him. The two accounts are utterly inconsistent; and the chronicler (in piecing his material together) has let them stand side by side, apparently without perceiving how the one contradicts the other.

I give this instance of the unreliability of the text as it has come down to us, because, though it has no immediate application to Samuel himself, it serves to show quite definitely that the Book which is named after him is not a consecutive narrative — that its events do not always fall in their right order, and are sometimes told twice over with variations which are impossible to reconcile. And lest it should be thought that I claim to have made these discoveries all by myself, let me add, in scriptural phrase, 'are they not written in the Book of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*' — and else-

where, by Biblical scholars whose right to speak with authority only the Fundamentalists will deny.

But though modern scholarship has freed those who have a mind to be freed from the superstition of the verbal inspiration of Scripture, I would remind my readers that a play-writer does not claim to be a historian. He takes an historical character, or a series of historical events, and out of the material with which history or legend provides him, endeavours to construct a dramatic figure which shall be consistent throughout. He may take an unduly favourable, or unfavourable view of the man and of his motives; but whatever liberty he takes with history, his main duty as a dramatist is to make his chosen character consistent; it is only of secondary importance that his reading should have behind it the support of history.

Nevertheless I do wish my reading of the character of Samuel to have the backing of probability, even though many of the incidents – including the frequent appearance of the Witch of Endor – are my own invention. And that probability I cannot find in a narrative which is so largely devoted to the whitewashing of Samuel under cover of the repeated statement that ‘the word of the Lord came to him’, whenever Samuel was bent upon having things his own way. My play is written to demonstrate that on those occasions Samuel’s God was Samuel himself. And in order to run Samuel down to earth (where he properly belongs), I have made the Witch of Endor my stalking-horse.

Samuel was the first, and only character in Old Testament history, who combined in his own person the functions of prophet, priest, judge, and ruler of Israel. How he came by them all, whether, as the chosen of the people, or ‘by the word of the Lord’, we are not told; but as no other is mentioned as holding authority after Eli, it seems probable that, before Eli’s death, his reputation was already made, so that he stepped naturally into Eli’s shoes, and presently, as the accepted prophet of the Lord, became Judge also.

As a prophet he began early and started well. In the Bible story it was an audible Voice which spoke to him, denouncing the misconduct of Eli’s sons, and Eli’s failure to restrain them.

It was the only time when we are told that the Voice was audible, though afterwards it spoke to him with great frequency; and I make no apology for applying Blake's interpretation of prophecy to that incident, when I make Samuel say to his son Abiah, 'I heard no voice – only in my own heart 'twas the Lord speaking; and *my* wrath against Eli and his sons was *His* wrath'. For that surely is how and why the Prophets have spoken all down the ages; and are we to be headed off from that wholesome truth by a convention of Old Testament phraseology?

The Bible narrative makes it somewhat doubtful whether Samuel did in fact exercise effective judgeship over all Israel; for at that time the Tribes were very loosely connected and the circuit within which we are told that Samuel judged Israel was within only a few miles of his own home at Ramah; and even when coming from so short a distance as Gibeah of Benjamin in search for his father's asses, Saul was quite unaware that Samuel was the prophet who lived there.

Another matter in doubt is whether Samuel gave the Israelites as full a deliverance from the surrounding nations as he claimed to have done; for though we are told that 'the Philistines were subdued, and came no more into the coasts of Israel all the days of Samuel' we find that one of their causes for national discontent, when Israel came asking for a King to rid them of their enemies, was that garrisons of Philistines had made strongholds of some of their cities, and to drive out these garrisons was one of the first things which Saul had to do. At any rate Samuel's policy had been a policy of live-and-let-live; he had made peace with the Amorites, and in no case had he set himself the task of exterminating the enemy to the last man, woman, and child which he imposed upon Saul as a divine command when Saul made war upon Amalek.

The Book of Samuel gives two different versions of the Israelites' request for a King to rule over them. In the one (1 Samuel VIII, 1-9) the main reason was not Samuel's failure to withstand the inroads of the Philistines and the Ammonites, but the misgovernment of his two sons, whom, in his old age, he had appointed to be judges, and whose mis-

doings he did not restrain. It was a similar charge to that which Samuel, 'speaking the word of the Lord', had made against Eli. But now it is no longer against the neglectful ruler that the wrath of the Lord is to be kindled, but against those who make complaint. And so 'because the thing displeased Samuel', the God of Samuel begins speaking the word of Samuel; and in the person of Samuel it is the Lord himself whom they have rejected that He should not reign over them.

In the other version (1 Samuel XII, 1-13), Samuel, in his valedictory address, states quite definitely that it was Saul's defeat of Nahash the Ammonite, which caused the Children of Israel to ask for a King, and that Saul was the people's choice because of it. And in that version so little is the misgovernment of Samuel's sons the cause of discontent, that he actually names them among the benefits which his long and blameless judgeship has conferred upon Israel.

But though the reasons differ, the condemnation remains the same; and in asking for a King in the place of Judges the people have done very wickedly. And yet we find in the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut. XVII, 14-15) that the substitution of Kings for Judges, when the Children of Israel had entered into possession of the land, was not only provided for, it was approved. Possibly Samuel had not the advantage of having read the Book of Deuteronomy, because it was not compiled, in its present form, till after his day; but for those who have, the sanction conferred on Kingship in Deuteronomy, entirely disposes of Samuel's condemnation of it. His objection was merely personal.

The two versions I have quoted make it difficult to decide how Samuel's anointing of Saul to be King came about. The one thing that is quite certain, if we accept the second version, is that Saul was not unknown to Samuel, he was already the people's choice; and Samuel's problem was to make the people's choice seem secondary, and to impress upon Saul that the decision of the matter rested not with the people, but with the Lord himself by the mouth of his prophet. Samuel's only hope, of retaining the power which he so grudged to give up was to make Saul recognize that his

authority was only a delegated authority, and that all the initiative of Kingship was to remain with Samuel.

And so, in the generally accepted story, 'the Word of the Lord' gets busily to work, and prophetic vision becomes the *modus vivendi* for impressing upon Saul that Samuel is still to be the virtual ruler of Israel. So Samuel hears from the Lord of a young man, quite unknown to him, who has lost his father's asses, and has gone in search of them, and as (by some chance, or device) the asses have found their way into Samuel's safe-keeping, presently the young man turns up, and is duly impressed at finding that he and his asses have been brought to Samuel by divine intervention.

If Saul had already done a notable deed in the routing of the Ammonites, so that he had become 'the desire of Israel' (1 Sam. IX, 20) the finding of the lost asses was a curiously superfluous device for the Lord to employ for bringing Saul to the notice of Samuel; only if it was Samuel's device does it become understandable; and it is on that ground that I have adhered to a story which may only be legend. Samuel's motive is plain: compelled to yield to the popular demand, he starts training Saul to accept a subservient kingship, and sends him home to await further orders: 'seven days shalt thou tarry till I come to thee and shew thee what thou shalt do'. And then, though he has already anointed Saul to be King, he calls the people together, and to make it quite clear that Saul is not the people's choice but the Lord's, he causes lots to be cast, and the lot falls first on the tribe of Benjamin, then on the house of Kish, and finally on Saul. Why Saul, already the anointed of the Lord, hid himself from the honour that had thus fallen upon him and had to be routed out, is not explained. Was it that he had begun honestly to doubt whether he was, indeed, the chosen of the Lord, or only of Samuel?

But though Saul has now been publicly made King, the government is still with Samuel; he draws up the laws for the ruling of the kingdom, writes them in a book, and sends Saul and the people back to their homes; king and people are to wait for the prophet's word of command.

And according to the Bible narrative (though here the

sequence is doubtful) it is only after this that we get what, in Samuel's valedictory address, is given as the initial reason of the people's demand for a King – Saul's summoning of the Tribes to the defeat of the Ammonites. Without any bidding from Samuel he takes the initiative, and in doing so lays down a new policy – namely that when one Tribe is attacked all the other Tribes shall come to its assistance. Their failure to do so in the past has kept Israel in a state of subjection. Saul will have no more of it; he unites the Tribes for battle and is brilliantly successful. If this is allowed to go on, Saul will become dangerous to Samuel.

Now if this is indeed the true sequence of events, though the Kingdom has now been established, the laws written, and the people sent back to their homes, there has been as yet no sign of God's wrath against Israel: indeed very much the other way – the Lord has told Samuel that he has heard the cry of his people, and has chosen Saul to be their captain, 'that he may save them out of the hand of the Philistines', Saul has been kissed and anointed, sent on his way with blessing: the spirit of the Lord has come upon him and the gift of prophecy, making a new man of him. Only as an afterthought does the Lord's wrath descend upon Israel for having asked for a King in accordance with what was laid down for them in the Book of Deuteronomy. There are, in fact, two stories, which with all their contradictions have been roughly, and somewhat inconsecutively joined together; and through these inconsistencies one has to find one's way without any certainty as to which was the truer story. But in the sequel there is no doubt whatever that Samuel is bent on keeping up his prestige as prophet, and retaining as much power as he possibly can: and for that he uses the technique of his day – the technique of divine intervention. And so, when a devastating storm of thunder and rain falls upon the harvest, it is the wrath of the Lord declaring itself (somewhat belatedly) for the wickedness of Israel in asking for a King. And because Saul turns out not to be the sort of King that Samuel would like him to be, henceforth there is conflict between them, and Samuel does all he can to undo Saul's work for the establishing of his kingdom over a united people.

In his attempt to dissuade the Children of Israel from desiring a King, Samuel had, quite untruthfully, told them (1 Sam. VIII, 11-18) the sort of King that Saul was going to be. There is not a shadow of a suggestion that Saul ever was that sort of King, or that the people ever asked to be delivered from him. On the contrary, after his death we are told that he was 'lovely and pleasant' in his life, and the daughters of Israel are adjured to weep for him because of all the benefit which they had received at his hands.

Saul's offence, for Samuel, was that he was too successful, and did not wait sufficiently upon Samuel's word of command. When, on his own initiative, he had gathered the people together for the rescue of Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites, Samuel had not been consulted, or called on to offer sacrifice or give his blessing to the enterprise. It was too signal a deliverance to be censured after the event, but – it was not to happen again! And so, from then on, Samuel begins to impose conditions, making Saul's task more difficult – sometimes impossible. On one occasion he fixes a day, breaks his word, waits till the people are scattered before an enemy arrayed for battle; and when forced by that circumstance, Saul offers the sacrifice himself – for that single assumption of the priestly office, he is denounced by Samuel; and the Kingdom is to be taken from him and given to another.¹ And presently, behind Saul's back, Samuel begins to devise how to divide the Kingdom against him, and supplant him with a man more to his own liking.

And in all these underhand doings 'the word of the Lord' is the accompaniment. It is the word of the Lord which forbids any taking of the spoil after the defeat of Amalek, though on many previous occasions (as recorded in Numbers and Deuteronomy, and the Book of Joshua) spoil *was* taken as a matter of course as the reward of victory. It is the Lord who tells Samuel to go and anoint David (another case of an unknown person whom he had never heard of); it is the Lord who instructs him to tell lies should Saul hear about it; always, in his malicious devices against Saul, the Lord is his

¹ Yet, on a later occasion, when David took upon himself the priestly office and offered sacrifice (II Sam. VI, 17-18) he was *not* judged for it

guide; and when David, the beloved of Saul, becomes his accomplice in treachery, they divide the Kingdom against him; David seeks alliance with Achish, King of Gath, an enemy of Israel, Samuel dies, and Saul goes to meet defeat and death at the hand of the Philistines on Mount Gilboa.

On all these matters the action of my play follows the Bible narrative fairly closely, though in the commentary of the characters I give a very different reading of the mind and motives of Samuel, the Kingmaker, to the one which is generally accepted. But in one scene where the chroniclers' whitewash has been laid on too thick to be tolerated, I have devised that Samuel himself, shall for discerning readers, remove the whitewash, by making him dictate, for the admiration of posterity, how deeply he mourned that the Lord should have repented for having made Saul King over Israel. If Samuel wrote the history of the Judges he may also have written some of his own; if he did, it would account for much. And so I have taken dramatic licence to account for a declaration of Samuel's personal benevolence toward Saul which the rest of the story makes quite incredible.

I suppose that some, perhaps many, of my readers hold views which do not allow Samuel's credentials to be questioned: for them — belief in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures stands between him and any freer reading of a traditionally revered character. But as I believe that a good deal of Old Testament history has, from its too literal acceptance lain as a dead weight, not only on the intelligence of its readers, but on Christianity itself, I have had a very real concern in the writing of this play. For I believe that 'the word of the Lord', which came so frequently to Samuel, was not the word of a God who has any right to our respect, but only the word of a prophet jealous in his own interests, greedy of power, vengeful, double-dealing, and deceitful. Possibly the one he most deceived was himself — so sincerely deceived that, when he spoke 'the word of the Lord' he did not know that he was only speaking the word of Samuel.

SAMUEL, THE KING-MAKER

PROLOGUE

JASHER, *an old man, sits looking quietly back into the past.*
There is a long pause before he speaks.

JASHER I am Jasher, the writer of history, faithful servant to my Lord Samuel. What he bade me write, I wrote for him in his two books, the Book of Joshua, and the Book of Judges. What he did not bid me to write, I wrote in my own book – the Book of Jasher. But after that he was dead, my own book was taken from me; they took it and burned it, because there was truth in it that was not to be told. Nevertheless, in his Book my name is recorded for posterity to remember. But of *my* book only the few words which he bade me write in it – words which, maybe, were not true.

I served Samuel, and feared him. But I loved Saul. Was it not written in the Book of Jasher?

(Slowly the curtain closes.)

ACT I

SCENE 1

SAMUEL *sits in his house at Ramah; before him stands JASHER, his amanuensis, and trusted servant. JASHER has told the old man something which has not pleased him.*

SAMUEL The elders of Israel coming, you say? I did not say that they might come.

JASHER No, Holiness. I think that is why.

SAMUEL (*suspiciously*) What do you mean – ‘that is why’?

JASHER Because, Holiness, to the messengers they sent, you gave no answer . . . They have waited, Holiness.

SAMUEL They should have waited longer.

JASHER No doubt, Holiness. But now they have sent to say that the matter is urgent.

SAMUEL And what that matter may be, they still do not tell me.

JASHER Did Holiness need telling?

SAMUEL Eh? Why do you ask that, Jasher?

JASHER Surely the Prophet of the Lord, the High Priest, and Lord Judge of Israel, knows — everything.

SAMUEL Not everything, Jasher. Sometimes I hear the Word of the Lord speaking to me. Sometimes it is only rumour that I hear . . . I do not know the Lord's Will until He has spoken to me . . . Tell me, Jasher, why are they coming?

JASHER With all submission, Holiness, I would rather leave the saying of it to them.

SAMUEL Ah! So they are coming to complain, are they?

JASHER Not exactly to complain, Holiness.

SAMUEL Oh, yes: But they are! I know, I know! Those sons of mine have been making trouble for me again. It's the old story: behind my back they are doing as Eli's sons did when *he* grew old. And it'll be the curse of Eli they'll bring on me, if I let it go on. I must see them; where are they?

JASHER My lord Abiah is here, Holiness; but my lord Joel is giving judgment at Mizpah and does not return till to-morrow.

SAMUEL Judgment! What sort of judgment will that be? Now that I am old, my sons walk no longer in *my* way, nor give heed to my counsel. What they do, I know not.

JASHER That is what the elders say, Holiness.

SAMUEL Are *coming* to say, you mean?

JASHER Yes, Holiness: I think so.

SAMUEL You don't think — you *know*. Come, out with it, man! Speak! (JASHER *hesitates*) Nay, is it not better that I should know, so as to have my answer ready for them?

JASHER They are coming to make request, Holiness.

SAMUEL Aye? For what?

JASHER That they may have a King.

SAMUEL A King! So! Aye, surely they are a rebellious people! Forty-two years have I served them faithfully and well, speaking to them the Word of the Lord, giving them just

judgment, and peace from all their enemies. But now it is a King they want! And I might have made myself their King, had I so chosen – what was to prevent? Nay, in all but in name, I was, and still am . . . And they come wanting a King! . . . Well, the Lord shall hear of it. Yes! He shall hear of it! And it's not going to please *Him*, any more than it pleases *me* – not if I know it! Not while I am still Judge of Israel . . . It's not going to be so easy for them as they think (*he rises from his seat*) When they come, I shall be gone . . . They should have waited.

JASHER (*diffidently*) But, Holiness . . .

SAMUEL Yes; well? Do you expect *me* to wait for *them*?

JASHER Holiness, they are here now.

SAMUEL So you also have deceived me, Jasher. Why did you not warn me?

JASHER I did not know they would be here so soon. Their messenger has but just come.

SAMUEL Well, we will see them . . . Let them come in.

(JASHER goes. SAMUEL claps his hands three times. Two LEVITES enter.)

Bring me my vestments.

(*The LEVITES go up two steps through curtains at the side: they come out again carrying the High Priest's head-dress and vestments. They array SAMUEL: then they open the curtains. SAMUEL mounts to the Seat of Judgment. The LEVITES stand to right and left on the lower step. Twelve ELDERS of Israel enter, and bow themselves before him. SAMUEL remains silent, eyeing them sternly. There is a long pause: The ELDERS stand in obvious embarrassment; at last one of them speaks.*)

1ST ELDER Holiness, is it permitted that we speak?

SAMUEL Speak.

1ST ELDER Holiness, this is the voice of all Israel that thou hearest. We speak only as they have commanded us. Many years hast thou judged Israel, and hast been our help and stay – a leader and a guide to God's chosen People. But now thou art old; and because the burden has become too heavy for thee,

thou hast given rule and judgment unto the men of thine own house. But thy sons walk not in thy ways, to do justly as thou hast done. They have turned aside to seek after lucre; with them the rich find favour, and the poor are defrauded, and in taking bribes they corrupt judgment. So now, because thou art no longer able to prevent these things being done, we require that thou give us a King to rule over us.

SAMUEL A King?

1ST ELDER Yes, Holiness.

SAMUEL Why do you ask for – a King?

1ST ELDER Other nations have Kings, Holiness; and we shall be stronger, and more feared, having a King, than with only Judges to rule over us. Also in war, we shall do better against our enemies – with a King to lead us.

SAMUEL In war? Have I not kept you in peace – many years?

1ST ELDER Yes, Holiness; but some of our cities are still held by garrisons of the Philistines, and we might soon be rid of them, had we a King to lead us.

SAMUEL You might, or you might not. Is it not better to let sleeping dogs lie? Have ye considered what price ye must pay for – a King? Hearken, and I will tell you. To make himself great in your eyes, instead of peace, he will give you war. He will take your sons from their labour in the fields to make for him instruments and chariots of war. He will have horsemen, and footmen, and men to run before him, and trumpeters to sound his coming wheresoever he goes. And he will appoint him captain over hundreds and over thousands, whose word you must obey. And he will take the best of your land, and make you be servants to ear his ground, and reap his harvests. And he will take your daughters to be his cooks and confectioners, and the best of your vineyards and olive-yards will be for his servants; a tenth also of your harvest will he take, and of your asses and your flocks. So will ye be his bondsmen, and no longer a free people . . . And ye shall cry out in that day because of your King that ye have chosen; and

the Lord will not hear you in that day, because ye would not hear His Word that I spake unto you.

AN ELDER Surely, Holiness, if you entreat the Lord for us, He will not give us such a King to rule over us, but a better.

SAMUEL Why should I entreat the Lord for a rebellious people? For he gave you Judges to be your rulers, to make of you a people after his own heart – not like other nations serving strange Gods. Nay, heed not *me*: I am nothing! It is not *me* that ye have rejected; it is the Lord your God whom ye have rejected this day – asking for a King!

1ST ELDER We are sorry, Holiness, that what we ask does not please you; but we speak not for ourselves. The Children of Israel have sent and commanded us that we ask of you a King.

THE ELDERS Aye; a King, Holiness. We must have a King.

SAMUEL Enough! I have heard you. It is the voice of a rebellious people. On your heads be it! The Lord lay not this sin to *my* charge . . . Go, every man to his own city and his people, and say to them what I have said to you. And when the Lord has spoken His word to me, and made known His will, I will send for you again . . . Go, all of you!

(They bow themselves out. SAMUEL watches them go; then speaks)

Aye, depart from me, ye men of stubborn mind! The Lord do so to me, and more also, if I make not His will known, and his judgment upon Israel.

(He descends from the Seat of Judgment. The LEVITES take off his vestments, and bear them away.)

Jasher, find Abiah, and bid him come to me.

(JASHER goes.)

A King! A King! O God, send down Thy Judgment upon this people! Yea, give me a sign that I may declare Thy wrath against them for having rejected me, Thy servant, this day, that I should not rule over them. A sign, O Lord, give me to declare a sign of Thy wrath, that, fearing Thee, they may fear me also.

(Enter ABIAH.)

ABIAH Yes, Father?

SAMUEL (*angrily*) Abiah, this is your doing. You and Joel have done this.

ABIAH What have we done, Father?

SAMUEL The people are asking for a King.

ABIAH (*smoothly*) Well, why should they not?

SAMUEL 'Why not?' If they have a King, where am I; where are *you*? We judge Israel no more.

ABIAH (*quietly*) Lawgivers, Judges, Kings – they all have their turn and go. Prophets last longer. So long as the people believe in them, Prophets have more power.

SAMUEL What power shall I have – over a King?

ABIAH The same as over the people – if you make them believe in you. And as they have asked *you* for a King, you will have the choosing of him.

SAMUEL Whom *can* I choose?

ABIAH Why not one of us? Though judging is less trouble, I should rather like to be a King.

SAMUEL You! You that are the very cause of this evil that has come on me! Were I to name one of you to be King, they would spit you out at me like dirt, if what they say of you be true.

ABIAH What *do* they say?

SAMUEL That you, whom I made to be Judges in Israel, seek only after lucre, and sell judgment to the highest bidder – to the rich man at a price – to the poor man oppression.

ABIAH So, that's the tale, is it? Aye, surely these are a people who think to get something for nothing. Justice is a commodity – like everything else, and must be paid for. When a man wants food or raiment, sheep or oxen, house or land, you do not give it him – you ask a price for it. So also when a man comes to the Priest with a meat-offering for sacrifice, does not the Priest take part of it, though the offering be to God? And if the Priests are to be paid for their office, as was ordained by Moses, shall not Judges also receive their due, and be paid likewise?

(SAMUEL *is silent.*)

You see, Father. So, though I give judgment at a price, I do not sell the judgment which I deliver.

SAMUEL (*searchingly*) Is your price always the same, my son, for rich and poor?

ABIAH No, Father; for the poor man cannot pay the same price as the rich man; so the rich man pays more. And that is why – if I give judgment for the rich, those that expect something for nothing say that I have taken a bribe for it. Also, when two rich men come before me, I find out, from each separately, how much the matter is worth to him; and he to whom it is worth most pays most. Is not that fair, Father? So then – if I give judgment for him that paid most, the one that paid less is not pleased, and says that I take bribes, though I only take my due – even as the Priest takes *his* due. So you see, Father . . .

SAMUEL (*with a sigh*) Yes; I see, my son. But it likes me not. When I judged Israel, my judgments were free; and when all was done, the people brought me a free-will offering. It was the better way.

ABIAH Aye, so one of them told me the other day. 'Twas a man defrauded of his neighbour, who claimed judgment for nothing – said that, so long as you judged Israel, your way was his way.

SAMUEL Aye? What said you to that?

ABIAH Oh, he'd a clear case, so I gave judgment in his favour – had to.

SAMUEL Ah! So that time you met your match!

ABIAH Yes; but I got even with him afterwards. Next day he found that he had lost his father's asses.

SAMUEL Lost them?

ABIAH Yes. That night they were safe in the field; the next morning there was a break in the fence, and five of them were gone.

SAMUEL So I have a son who is also a thief!

ABIAH Legal restraint is the right word, Father. For what

he owed me, I took no more than my due. So now he has gone seeking them; but he won't find them.

SAMUEL A good man that, and worth knowing. What was his name? Where dwells he?

ABIAH His name? Saul; he is of Gibeah, his father a man of substance named Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. Aye, a fine-looking fellow he was too, and a leader of the people. I liked beating *him*. 'Twas worth it.

SAMUEL And you a Judge of Israel!

ABIAH A Judge has a right to his due like anyone else. But if I'd my choice, I'd sooner be a prophet.

SAMUEL You a prophet!

ABIAH Well, if I'm no longer to be a Judge, I must be something. Can you not teach me?

SAMUEL If you have not learned truth – if God's Voice has not spoken within you, *I* cannot make you a prophet.

ABIAH (*as he seats himself beside SAMUEL*) How did you come to be a prophet yourself, Father?

SAMUEL It was the Lord's doing – not mine. A day comes when you hear His Voice speaking to you.

ABIAH How – speaking? Is it a voice like a man speaking that you hear?

SAMUEL No; not like any voice – speaking. God's Voice comes to a man's heart. You hear Him not with the outward ear. But He speaks, and you know that it is *He* speaking.

ABIAH When did you first hear Him speak, Father?

SAMUEL When I was a child. It came to me suddenly one night; and it was a great thing that He called me to do then – to speak His Judgment upon Eli, the High Priest, and upon his sons for their evil doings – and I was but a child. I heard no Voice – only in my own heart 'twas the Lord speaking; and *my* wrath against Eli and his sons was *His* wrath.

ABIAH And did Eli believe you?

SAMUEL Aye, surely he did; for he knew that what I said was true. Nevertheless, had I not told him of – the Voice, he might *not* have believed.

ABIAH How came the Voice to *you*?

SAMUEL 'Twas this way. One day, I, a child, had seen with my own eyes the wickedness of his sons – how they took by force the offerings of the people, and lay with the women at the doors of the Tabernacle. And Eli rebuked them not. So that night I waited till Eli slept: then I went and wakened him. 'Here I am,' I said. 'You called me.' 'No,' he said; 'I did not call you. Go, and lie down.' I waited till he was asleep again; then I came a second time; 'Here I am,' I said. 'You called me.' 'No, I did not call you,' he said. I came a third time, saying the same words. Well, that set Eli thinking – no one else was in the house but we two. Whose voice, then, could it be but God's that I had heard? So he told me that, when next I heard the Voice, I was to say: 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.' Oh, I had heard well enough, for I knew what the Lord was telling me to do. But that was how I made Eli also believe that I *had* heard the Voice of the Lord speaking. -

ABIAH And you thought it right to do that, Father?

SAMUEL Aye, surely; for often men are slow to believe the Lord's Word when it is spoken by others. But those that *do* hear His Word hear it in the secret places of the heart. That, my son, is to be a Prophet – if you hear God speaking in your heart.

ABIAH What if the heart be evil, Father?

SAMUEL God would not speak to an evil heart.

ABIAH And did what you said come true?

SAMUEL Aye, it came true, though not so soon that I had not a fear that it might *not* come true. But of this, Abiah, man can always be sure – Evil brings evil upon itself. So when a prophet of the Lord sees evil being done, he can prophesy surely that more evil shall follow; and the Lord will fulfil his word – in His own time.

(ABIAH has listened with interest, but without much sympathy; and upon SAMUEL comes a feeling of failure and loneliness: a consciousness that he is the last of the old order.)

But when I am gone, will there be a prophet left in Israel? Nay, I know not! I am lonely, and desolate, and old; and my sons are no comfort to me, for they walk not in my way. After me, who shall come to guide Israel? It is the Lord's will: The days of the Judges are ended.

ABIAH Why, then, Father, was it not God's will that the people *should* ask you for a King?

SAMUEL Why should they ask *me* – for a King?

ABIAH If you choose the right man, Father, you may judge Israel still . . . So it's not to be me, eh? Had you chosen *me*, I would have done your bidding . . . Farewell, Father. (*He gets up to go.*) Maybe the Lord will find you – a better.

(SAMUEL *sits thinking*. ABIAH *stands looking at him, half pitying, half amused, then turns to go out. But as he goes* SAMUEL *calls him back.*)

SAMUEL Abiah . . . Where are Saul's asses?

ABIAH I have them no longer, Father.

SAMUEL Where are they?

ABIAH I sold them to Joel, for a good price.

SAMUEL Tell Joel he is to send them back to you.

ABIAH He will not – unless I repay him.

SAMUEL I will repay him! Go: send me Saul's asses.

(ABIAH *goes out, repeating softly to himself, in curious bewilderment as to what it can mean, SAMUEL'S command, 'Send me Saul's asses!'* SAMUEL *sits – thinking.*)

A C T I

S C E N E 2

The same scene. JOEL has now returned. He stands before SAMUEL, very conscious that his father is not pleased with him; but, like his brother Abiah, being accused, he defends himself.

SAMUEL So! 'Tis a fine pair of sons wherewith God has

afflicted me! Abiah in the seat of judgment taking bribes; and now you – a Priest of the Tabernacle, seeking counsel of witches.

JOEL Who told you that, Father?

SAMUEL Ah! 'Tis well that I take means to know things that my sons would like better that I should not. That woman – where is she?

JOEL They are bringing her, Father; as you commanded.

SAMUEL She was brought before you for judgment. Why did she not have it?

JOEL I found no harm in her – so I let her go.

SAMUEL Has not the law of Moses commanded: 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'?

JOEL A wise woman need not always be a witch, Father.

SAMUEL I never knew a wise woman that was not. For it was not God's will, when he made woman, to make her wise. Wisdom he kept for man.

JOEL But when a man has not that which he should have – may it not fall to others – aye, sometimes to a woman?

SAMUEL (*suspiciously*) What has this woman done for *thee*?

JOEL Let her tell that herself, Father. She is there, waiting.

SAMUEL Aye, and now here is judgment waiting for her. Let her be brought in.

(*JOEL goes to the door and signals.*)

JOEL She did no witchcraft for *me*, Father.

SAMUEL Stand aside, and hold your peace. We will hear what *she* says; nor shall she have thee for a defender. I will be judge now.

(*The woman enters with two men guarding her.*)

Thou evil woman, whence art thou? What is thy name?

WOMAN I have none, Holiness. The wise woman of Endor, men call me.

SAMUEL How com'st thou to be 'wise', woman?

WOMAN 'How' I know not, Holiness. The Lord has given me Knowledge for the service of men.

SAMUEL What service is that?

WOMAN I look for signs, Holiness. I watch the rising and the setting of the sun, and the changes of the moon; also the stars in their courses. And from them I learn the ways of Heaven – whether there is to be rain or drought, heat or cold, hail or tempest, blight or blessing. Also when the sun is to be darkened, I know the time of it; and when a shadow is to fall upon the moon, I know the day of it and the hour. (*SAMUEL makes a gesture of holy horror at such evil knowledge.*) Does not God also tell you, Holiness, of things which are to come?

SAMUEL Not by hidden divination, nor by the power of darkness, do I come to know God's will; for those ways are evil. There are things it is not lawful that any man should seek to know: and for a woman to know them is sin worthy of death.

WOMAN If what I foretell be true, Holiness, how can it be evil?

SAMUEL If it is foretold by power of evil, how can good come of it? Out of thine own mouth I judge thee for that which thou hast done. It is not permitted for any so to do – and live.

WOMAN If I am judged of my life, I have that to say, Holiness, which only you may hear.

(*Their looks meet; there is a pause. SAMUEL looks at JOEL; he seems ill at ease.*)

SAMUEL Go, Joel; I will hear her alone.

(*JOEL goes out reluctantly; there is a furtive look about him – if he can, he is going to listen. SAMUEL makes a gesture of dismissal to the two men on guard. They go out. The WOMAN looks at SAMUEL, and smiles. There is a pause.*)

SAMUEL (*suspiciously*) What have you done for my son?

WOMAN Nothing but what was good. I did but tell him that, for the saving of his harvest, he should reap quickly.

SAMUEL Wherefor?

WOMAN I saw signs, which he did not . . . Why do you shut your eyes to signs, Holiness? Are they not from God?

SAMUEL *Signs*, you say?

WOMAN Aye; and they come not from evil spirits, nor by

divination, nor by enchantment: but are there where God wills them to be – for man to be blind to.

SAMUEL You say that *I* am blind, woman?

WOMAN (*pointing upwards*) Holiness, see yon cloud.

SAMUEL I see it.

WOMAN And you see nothing in it? . . . Nothing? . . . If you had my eyes to help you, you'd see better. 'In three days,' it says, 'in three days.' Well, if you misjudge me for being what I am, and what God made me, I shall then be dead. But I shall be seeing it better from the other side . . . 'Tis pity you can't use these eyes of mine while they are still living. There's wisdom in them – for you, could you but know.

SAMUEL How would you have me to know, woman?

WOMAN You are a seer, Holiness; yet you see not what *I* see: because your God is not my God.

SAMUEL Who is your God?

WOMAN My God is Truth.

SAMUEL *My* God is the only True God. How then can Truth be your God?

WOMAN Your God says what you want Him to say – Samuel. My God hears no prayer of man to change His will, once He has made it.

SAMUEL Why are you saying this?

WOMAN Because *my* God can give you what you are asking of *your* God . . . You are wanting a sign, are you not, of God's wrath against this people, who are putting you away, so that they may have a King (*This makes SAMUEL sit up.*) Well, I can give you the sign – if you spare my life . . . Well? What about it, Samuel?

SAMUEL If I spare your life, how shall I know whether you will have told me the truth?

WOMAN 'Tis but three days. Hold me for three days, and if it be not the truth, then slay me.

SAMUEL What *is* the sign?

WOMAN Your oath first, Samuel – that if what I tell you be true – you will suffer 'a witch' to live.

SAMUEL (*after a pause*) Aye, speak, then!

WOMAN Your oath, Samuel.

SAMUEL I swear by the living God, that if the sign whereof you tell me come true in three days – I will suffer you to live – to your life's end.

WOMAN To *my* life's end? That's not good enough, Samuel. You are a clever man! . . . To *your* life's end would be better. Say it!

SAMUEL Aye: to *my* life's end, and further – if it be God's will: I swear it.

WOMAN Hearken, then . . . Yonder cloud is the sign. It's like came yesterday: it comes again to-day. Yesterday 'twas like a closed fist – so (*she begins to make gestures – first of a closed fist, then of a hand opening more and more*). To-day it begins to open – so. To-morrow it will be – so. The day after – so. Then – so! (*She turns her open palm and makes a swift downward stroke.*) And there will come thunder and lightning and rain upon the earth, *and the harvest will be destroyed!* – 'a sign of God's wrath upon this people – for asking of you a King' . . . Eh, Samuel?

(SAMUEL *sits thinking.*)

SAMUEL In three days?

WOMAN Aye, in three days.

SAMUEL It must not be sooner.

WOMAN It will not be sooner. If it be God's will that I should die – it might even be four. Nay, would that not serve you as well? Four days, Samuel?

SAMUEL If it comes not till four days, you shall not be slain . . . And if what you tell come to be true, God also shall pardon you.

(SAMUEL *claps his hands and calls. The GUARDS enter.*)

Take this woman, and see that ye hold her safe, till I give command.

(*The GUARDS take hold of her and lead her away. As she goes, she turns and points up, and with a motion of her fingers she counts three. She looks back at SAMUEL, but he makes no sign.*)

Send me my servant, Jasher. Bid him come quickly . . .

(*They go. SAMUEL stands looking at the cloud. JASHER enters.*)

JASHER Yes, Holiness.

SAMUEL Jasher, call back the Elders of Israel! Bid them be here in three days.

JASHER Will that be possible, Holiness?

SAMUEL Aye: for they have not yet gone far. Send after them swift messengers. Say that the Word of the Lord has come to me; and His command to declare it to all Israel. So shall they know that I am His prophet, and that He speaks be me. Make haste, Jasher.

(*JASHER goes. SAMUEL again stands looking at the cloud.*)
Three days – and then – the sign! O Lord, I beseech Thee, make this Thy Word, that Israel may know and fear.

(*Enter JOEL. He has a knowing look.*)

JOEL Well, Father? What have you done with her? Is the woman to die?

SAMUEL If she have spoken truth to me, she dies not.

JOEL (*ironically*) So you also have suffered a witch to live.

(*To that but of insolence SAMUEL makes no reply.*)

SAMUEL Joel, send a man whom you can trust to Gibeah; and bid him inquire there of a man named Saul, son of Kish, the Benjamite, and bring back word of all that he can learn concerning him.

JOEL Ah? Saul, the man whose asses Abiah sold to me. He said, Father, that you would repay me for the return of them.

SAMUEL (*impatiently*) I will repay you. Go, and do as I bid you quickly!

(*SAMUEL goes out, leaving JOEL alone.*)

JOEL So? It's going to be Saul, is it? God, do you hear that? You've chosen Saul.

ACT I

SCENE 3

SAMUEL *is dictating to JASHER the story of Israel, in the days of Joshua. He moves slowly to and fro, pausing now and then, as the writing goes on.*

SAMUEL 'And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, that the Lord cast down great stones from Heaven upon them; and those which died of the hail-stones were more than those whom Israel slew with the sword.' And in your book, Jasher, write this, which was told me when I was a child. Whether it be true, I know not, but it makes a good story. 'Joshua cried unto the Lord and said, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon". And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed -'

(A while back a SERVANT has entered, and stands waiting to speak. SAMUEL sees him and stops.)

Yes? What is it?

SERVANT A man is here, Holiness, asking that he may have a word with the seer.

SAMUEL The seer? He did not ask for me by name?

SERVANT No, Holiness.

SAMUEL Let him come in. *(The SERVANT goes.)* This will be the man, Jasher, whom those I sent will have taught the way . . . Go, now, and come again presently.

(As JASHER goes out, he meets SAUL, turns and looks at him; and truly he is worth looking at - a man of noble bearing, tall and strong, and of a goodly countenance. And now SAMUEL is going to tame him to his purpose.)

SAMUEL Your name is Saul.

SAUL It is, Sir; but how come you to know it? For here I am a stranger.

SAMUEL You do not know whom I am?

SAUL No, sir.

SAMUEL Then what has brought you?

SAUL There was one who met me in the way, and told me that here lived a seer of whom I might inquire concerning that which I have lost, and have been seeking.

SAMUEL Your father's asses?

SAUL Whence knew you that, sir?

SAMUEL Whence does a seer know anything? . . . How came you to lose them?

SAUL The fence of their field had been broken.

SAMUEL You did not know it was broken?

SAUL Not till, in the morning, I found they were gone.

SAMUEL So – having won your case – you lost your asses.

SAUL Sir, who *are* you that know all this?

SAMUEL I am Samuel, the prophet, whom the Lord made Judge over Israel.

SAUL Oh, pardon me, my lord, that I did not know. But I come from a small people, and among them only do I dwell.

SAMUEL Even so, yesterday the Lord spoke to me saying: 'To-morrow I will send thee a man of the Tribe of Benjamin, to inquire of thee about that which he has lost.' Be not concerned about thy father's asses. They are here waiting for thee.

SAUL My Lord, how came they *here*?

SAMUEL Because, when the fence of their field was broken it was the Lord's doing; and when the asses strayed, He guided them in the way that they should go. So also He guided thee that thou shouldst come to inquire of me to whom the Lord has revealed His will concerning thee.

SAUL (*astonished*) Concerning *me*?

SAMUEL For He spake unto me saying, 'I will make this man Saul to be the Captain of my people, to make them a strong nation, and to save them from the hand of their enemies. For I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me that they should have a King.'

SAUL Holiness! How can such as I be King? For Benjamin is the least of the Tribes; and what is my Father, or what am I, that I should rule over Israel?

SAMUEL The Lord sees not as man sees; nor does He choose by the hearing of the ear, or by the seeing of the eye; but by that which is within – even a man's heart. So has the Lord chosen thee to be His Anointed this day. Howbeit, let no man know of it, until I have declared God's judgment upon this people. For they have done very wickedly in asking for a King . . . But they shall have their wish.

SAUL But, Holiness, if what they ask is evil, is it well that it should be granted?

SAMUEL Nay, God has heard them. He is Judge, not I. On their heads be it! They shall have a King.

SAUL I would that He had chosen one wiser than I.

SAMUEL Fear not. Thou shalt not lack wisdom – so long as thou hearken to His voice.

SAUL How shall I know – His voice, Holiness?

SAMUEL Am I not His prophet? Though this people have rejected me, God has not. When thou art in need of counsel He will speak to thee – by *me*. So, in fear and obedience to His word, shalt thou rule Israel.

SAUL Holiness, there is one thing which yet troubles me.

SAMUEL Aye? Speak.

SAUL If, to fulfil God's wrath against Israel, I am to be King, what help to them am I? But if it be for good and not evil, shall He not hear my prayer for this people, over which I am to rule?

SAMUEL What prayer wouldst thou make?

SAUL That He forgive them for asking of Him a King.

SAMUEL He will forgive, so long as thou dost rule according to His will. Doubt not. Tarry with me this night; and tomorrow, when I have anointed thee King, return to thy Father's house, until the day when the Lord shall make known before the eyes of all Israel that thou art His chosen.

SAUL Shall Israel be willing for a man whom they know not to be King?

SAMUEL There shall be no King in Israel save him whom the Lord has chosen. Have no fear; for when I have anointed

thee, the spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee, and thou shalt be turned into another man. And if in all things thou do as I bid thee, God shall be with thee, and keep thee in the way wherein thou shouldst go. . . Come, leave here, all that thou hast brought with thee for thy journey, and follow me.

(SAMUEL goes out. SAUL lays aside his staff and scrip and is about to follow, when ABIAH enters. They look at each other in surprise; but do not speak. SAUL goes out after SAMUEL. ABIAH stands looking after him; he is evidently much puzzled. Along with his scrip SAUL has left five halters for his asses. ABIAH takes them up and handles them.)

ABIAH What? Come to fetch his asses? Hm.

(He goes to the outer door and calls.)

Joel!

(JOEL enters.)

JOEL Yes?

ABIAH Yonder is Saul – the man whose asses I took. What brings him here? Has he come to complain?

JOEL You brought him, brother.

ABIAH I?

JOEL Oh, yes. You did him a good turn when you took from him his asses. What you told the High Judge of Israel about Saul seems to have pleased him . . . Saul is going to be King.

ABIAH Going to be King?

JOEL Yes. Why not? The Old Man won't have you or me; but he's got to choose somebody, who, he thinks, will suit him. So why not Saul?

ABIAH But how comes he here?

JOEL I don't know. Ask Father. Saul has come, I shouldn't wonder, to have his first lesson in 'kingly obedience', shall we call it? He mustn't be too much of a King, you know, if he's to please the Lord – and Samuel.

ABIAH I told him that the other day; a King needn't make much difference to *him*, I said, so long as he chose the right man . . . Saul? I wonder whether he *has*. In my dealings with

him, I didn't find him a very yielding character – far from it.

JOEL I also have done the Old Man a good turn – or tried to.

ABIAH Eh? What was that?

JOEL Got him to consult a wise woman; which is not quite according to the Law of Moses. She's told him something – what, I don't know – but he's going to make use of it; so her life is to be spared.

ABIAH Where is she now?

JOEL The Old Man is keeping her – safe. And if what she's told him comes true, then it isn't witchcraft – it's 'the Word of the Lord.'

ABIAH You know, Joel, I think Father's a bit of a wizard himself, but doesn't know it. You can call anything the Word of the Lord, if you want to. And when my lord Samuel wants anything rather badly, that's what he calls it. Well, where's the difference between that and being a wizard?

JOEL (*smoothly*) The Lord God of Israel is the difference, brother. Who *is* the Lord God of Israel? – practically.

ABIAH Yes, you're right. Only the other day he was telling me how first he became a prophet; and 'my wrath was God's wrath', he said. And it's the same now when the people are asking for a King. Because *he* doesn't like it, *his* wrath is *God's* wrath.

JOEL Aye. Of which presently he'll be wanting to give them a sign . . . I wonder how he'll do it. (*He stands thinking.*) Look! Here's your man Saul coming back.

(*Enter SAUL.*)

ABIAH Ah! Saul of Gibeah, are you not?

SAUL (*stiffly*) Yes, I am.

ABIAH You remember me? I gave judgment in your favour when I was last in Gibeah.

SAUL You did, my lord.

ABIAH For which you offered no payment.

SAUL None being due.

ABIAH Well, I hear that your asses have now come back to you.

SAUL (*startled*) My asses? How do they concern you?

ABIAH I took them, as payment for that due which you denied me . . . No, not theft; recovery of a legal debt . . . I just wanted you to know.

(*This gives SAUL a shock.*)

SAUL Then how came they – here?

ABIAH The Holy One, hearing of what I had done, required that I should return them.

SAUL To *him*?

ABIAH Yes; in order, apparently, that he might return them to *you*. What I told him about you seems to have – interested him.

(*SAUL stands stupent.*)

SAUL God! What is here? What have I done that he should have so deceived and mocked me? . . . Oh! my God!

(*He runs out.*)

JOEL You've given the Old Man away, Abiah. You shouldn't have done that.

ABIAH Well, he's taken the asses off us. He can't have it both ways.

JOEL But he has repaid us for them.

ABIAH He hasn't repaid *me*.

JOEL Oh, no? So he doesn't think the debt was a legal one; and 'just wanted you to know'.

(*He gives a spiteful chuckle.*)

(*Enter SAMUEL.*)

SAMUEL Where is Saul?

JOEL He's run away, Father. Abiah frightened him.

SAMUEL Abiah, what have you done?

ABIAH Told him the truth about the asses. It seemed to surprise him.

JOEL Yes; it quite startled him. So now – he's gone.

SAMUEL Gone! The man whom I had chosen to be King over Israel!

JOEL Finds it too great an honour, and has run away.

(*SAMUEL stands faced with a situation which he does not at all like. He begins to have his doubts.*)

ABIAH (*maliciously*) You think he was the right man, Father?
(SAMUEL looks at him angrily, turns without a word, and goes in.)

JOEL And the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying –
‘Samuel, you’ve made a mistake.’

ABIAH Yes, I think we saw it come. What’s going to happen,
Joel, if Samuel and the Lord cease to have trust in each other?

JOEL It will be very interesting.

ACT I

SCENE 4

SAMUEL *stands looking very anxiously at the sky.* JOEL
stands watching him.

JOEL (*meaningly*) What’s the weather going to be, Father?
... Is thunder about?

SAMUEL (*uneasily*) What do you think, Joel?

JOEL There are clouds; but I don’t think they mean anything. I needn’t have been in such a hurry over my reaping. What that woman told me hasn’t come true – proving that she’s no witch, and that, in letting her live, I judged rightly . . . What are you going to do about it, Father? Let her go?

SAMUEL Send word to her keepers that she be brought to me.

JOEL What? Now?

SAMUEL Yes. Now.

JOEL Holiness, you know the Elders of Israel are waiting?

SAMUEL What of it?

JOEL They have been waiting a whole day. This is not the third, but the fourth day since you sent word for them to return.

SAMUEL Well, let it be the fourth day.

JOEL They are getting impatient, Holiness.

SAMUEL Do as I tell you, Joel. Have that woman brought to me. Quickly.

(JOEL goes. Again SAMUEL looks at the sky; its appearance does not please him.)

O God, if I do not give them a sign this day, will they believe in Thy wrath? Or that I am Thy prophet? Lord, if I have served Thee faithfully, forsake me not now. The sign, O Lord; give me the sign. (*He claps his hands, and calls.*) Jasher!

(JASHER enters.)

JASHER Yes, Holiness?

SAMUEL Send word for the Elders to be here ready, when presently I send for them.

JASHER Yes, Holiness.

(JASHER goes. The WISE WOMAN enters, accompanied by two GUARDS. JOEL follows.)

SAMUEL (*to the GUARD*) Leave her and go! (*They go out.*) You also can go, Joel.

(JOEL goes, not pleased at being thus dismissed.)

Woman, this is the fourth day; and still there is no sign. (*He points skywards.*)

WOMAN The day has not yet ended, Holiness.

SAMUEL If this day it comes not – you die.

WOMAN Yes, Holiness.

SAMUEL You say that you can read signs in the heavens which others are blind to. Where is the sign now?

(*There comes a very faint distant roll of thunder.*)

WOMAN There, Holiness . . . If it come not this day, so be it: thou art quit of me and of thine oath . . . But see! . . . Nay, it will not be long now.

(*As she speaks the sky has already begun to darken.*)

The people are waiting, Samuel – for the Lord's word to be spoken.

(Enter JASHER.)

JASHER The Elders are here, Holiness.

SAMUEL Bid them come in. Go, Woman; but I will not have thee depart yet. I will call thee again.

(She goes. SAMUEL claps his hands. The two LEVITES enter, carrying the High Priest's robes. They open the curtain behind the seat of Judgment. SAMUEL goes in. The ELDERS enter, followed by JOEL and ABIAH. Behind them presses a great crowd, which remains standing without.)

JOEL *(pointing)* Abiah, it looks as if the Old Man is going to get what he wanted.

ABIAH What is that?

JOEL A sign that Samuel's wrath is God's wrath. That woman was right after all.

(The two LEVITES enter, and part the curtains for the coming of SAMUEL. To give a touch of added importance, he keeps them waiting for a few moments; as he enters all bow. SAMUEL does not return their salute.)

SAMUEL Elders and men of Israel. They tell me that you have been waiting. I too have been waiting – for the Word of the Lord. His Word has come. This day He speaks – by *me*. Hear them, while I reason with you of that which ye asked of me. 'Give us a King to reign over us'. I have hearkened unto you in all that ye said, and ye shall have a King.

(This is received with loud applauses; which do not please SAMUEL.)

And ye are glad because I have said ye shall have a King. And behold, now I am old and grey-headed and the days of my judgment are over. And here I am whom ye have known all your days, having walked before you continually, fulfilling God's will for his people. Witness, then, against me, before the Lord – whose ox have I taken? . . . or whose ass have I taken? . . . Whom have I defrauded? . . . Whom have I oppressed? . . . or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?

(To this recital there is a rising murmur of protest: 'No no, Holiness! No.')

Let him speak now: and I will restore it to him.

ELDER Holiness, thou hast defrauded none of us; nor hast thou oppressed any; nor hast thou taken ought of any man's hand.

*(A voice from the crowd: 'But there be others, Holiness!'
The voice is hushed down by general consent.)*

SAMUEL So say ye all?

ELDERS We all say it.

SAMUEL The Lord is witness.

ELDERS He is witness.

SAMUEL Hear, then, the Word of the Lord, spoken by me, His prophet. It is the Lord who speaks now: not I.

(He makes a commanding gesture: they all bow themselves.)

Behold, I have hearkened unto the voice of my servant Samuel, that ye might have a King to reign over you . . . So shall it be. And I will appoint you a day; and ye shall come together in your Tribes and your families, and from among them, by the casting of lots, I will choose you a King.

(At this there is a murmur of applause, low and reverent. As SAMUEL continues speaking, he watches the weather for the coming storm.)

And if, hereafter, ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and rebel not against His commandments, it shall be well with you; and you and your King shall prosper in all that ye do, and he shall save you from the hand of your enemies. But if ye obey Me not, then shall My hand be against you, as it was against your fathers in the wilderness, when they rebelled against My servant Moses, and hearkened not to his word . . . Nevertheless, because ye have done very wickedly in asking for a King, now stand and see this great thing which I, the Lord, will do before your eyes this day. Behold, it is now wheat-harvest, and the reaping of your fields has begun. But that which ye have reaped, ye shall not store, neither shall ye make bread of that which ye have sown.

(While SAMUEL has been speaking, darkness has gathered; and now a low muttering of thunder is heard.)

For behold I will send thunder and hail upon you, and upon your harvest this day, that ye may perceive and know how great was your wickedness in asking for a King. Hear, O Israel, the Judgment of the Lord! I, Samuel, His prophet, have spoken it.

(There comes a sudden flash of lightning. SAMUEL raises his arms; his voice rises to meet the approaching storm.)

Now, therefore, O Lord, send down Thy wrath upon this people, that, ere this day be ended, Thy Word which I have spoken may be made true.

(As he speaks, there comes a crack of thunder. Lightning, thunder and hail follow. As the fury of the storm increases, the people prostrate themselves with cries of terror; with loud babblings they protest their willingness not to have him a King; but their voices can scarcely be heard above the noise of the thunder and hail. SAMUEL strikes an attitude: like the conductor of an orchestra he beats time to the raging of the storm, making it seem as though each roll of thunder came at his bidding.)

SAMUEL Lo! The wrath of the Lord! The wrath of the Lord, for the wickedness of His people!

(The curtain falls: the thunder goes on; then dies gradually away. When the curtain opens again, light is beginning to return. SAMUEL still stands master of the situation: the people are on their knees before him.)

JOEL That was very convincing, Abiah. I couldn't have believed it possible.

ABIAH 'Tis well that it should so — happen. King or no King, Samuel will still be ruler of Israel, now.

SAMUEL *(to the people)* Nay, fear no more! Though ye have done this wickedness, the Lord will not slay you, nor will His wrath be against you for ever, now that ye have repented of your sin. I will not cease to pray for you that He forsake not His people. And though from this day I am no longer Judge over Israel, hearken to me, and I will teach you the right

way. But if ye continue to do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both you and your King . . . Go now, return each to his own Tribe and City, and there wait till I send for you, on the day appointed for the choosing of your King.

(The ELDERS, hushed with awe, make their obeisances and go.)

JOEL You did that well, Holiness.

(SAMUEL does not like the tone in which that is said. Without a word, he points to the door. JOEL and ABIAH go out, and SAMUEL remains alone: no, not quite alone. Behind him, unperceived, the WISE WOMAN has entered. She stands watching him. Distant thunder is still heard as the storm moves on its way.)

SAMUEL O God, I thank Thee that Thou hast given me power this day to declare Thy Word, and to make known Thy Judgment upon this people.

WOMAN Your God, or my God, Samuel?

(SAMUEL turns and stares at her angrily, yet with a touch of fear.)

Aye; which was it, sent that storm? Was it yours or mine?

SAMUEL Mine, Woman! Aye, surely mine. For even as I spake the Word and called on His Name, He thundered to me out of heaven. It was He, He only, that answered when I called for the sign of His wrath against this people.

WOMAN Aye; you made a good story of it, Samuel, and chose your time well; came in on the minute, didn't you? But I gave you the day; had I not, would all the Elders have been here?

SAMUEL God's curse be on you, Woman! You tempted me; with fair words you tempted me, promising me a sign. And because I doubted whether God *would* hear me at the time appointed, I listened where I should have been deaf – to you, O accursed one! and took counsel of Evil. *Your* God is nothing – has no meaning, does not exist. Not from him came the wonder which my God has wrought at my word before all Israel this day. It would have come, had I only had the faith for it, without your aid or telling.

WOMAN Aye, surely; it would still have come – even had I not spoken – aye, even had you slain me.

SAMUEL Therefore, to you I owe *nothing*.

WOMAN Your oath, Samuel.

SAMUEL I gave you life, when I should have given you death. Take it and go! And never let me see your face again.

WOMAN Nay, but hear me before I go. You have a dangerous God, Samuel – a God of vengeance and wrath – too much like yourself to be trusted. Try to lead Him by the nose, and some day He may turn on you for it. You say you doubted of Him, when you should have trusted. May it not be that His wrath is not against Israel, but against Samuel?

(*Distant thunder.*)

Ah! Hark!

SAMUEL No; for 'twas when *I* called on Him that He spoke the Word. Had His wrath been against *me*, He would not have so spoken then.

WOMAN Can you be sure of that, Samuel? . . . Nay, my God is a safer God for man to put trust in. For my God is Law; and in Law is no wrath, save against them that, being fools, are blind to it. What does the God of Law know or care whether you be Judge of Israel, or an outcast of the people? Whether you be alive or dead? The God of Law that is higher than the Heavens, cannot be moved or changed by man's will, nor canst thou turn Him from His course by prayer or supplication. But if a man break that Law, that Law breaks him. There is no wrath in thunder, or lightning, or hail, or tempest; but there's death in it. The lightning does not strike a man for the evil that he has done, but the fool that gets in the way of it . . . Hark! Here it comes again, though you thought it was over. What does your God say to that? Can He stop it? You, His prophet, go out among those hail-stones, and they'll slay you. Stay within, and they'll not harm you . . . Mine is the safer God, Samuel, for the man that is wise to learn His ways. But for the fool He has no mercy.

SAMUEL Go, Woman!

WOMAN Into the hailstones to my death? No, Samuel, I'm not one of the fools. I'll bide here within awhile. It's not going to be long . . . This has been a good day for you, Holiness. Surely the people do well to fear one whose word God obeys. Did Samuel speak for Him? Or did He speak for Samuel? Well, well: some day we shall meet again.

(She goes.)

SAMUEL Oh! accursed woman! Why did I spare, when I should have slain? Oh, God, hear me! And if Thou hast pardoned my transgression, let not this evil woman live to triumph over me . . . and Thee. Give me, for sign . . .

(He stops, startled.)

A VOICE Your oath, Samuel.

(Whether he has indeed heard it, or whether it is only his conscience speaking to him, he cannot tell. But he does not finish what he was about to say. There is a long low roll of thunder. He stands listening to it. For the first time in his life SAMUEL is in doubt, whether what he hears is the word of the Lord.)

SAMUEL. Who spoke then?

ACT I

SCENE 5

JASHER *(speaking before the curtain)* And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord at Mizpah, and said to them, 'Though ye have rejected the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of Egypt, and delivered you from the hand of them that oppressed you, and have said unto Him, "Nay, but set a King to rule over us," now, therefore, present yourselves before the Lord that He may answer you according to the desire of your hearts.' And when the people were come to Mizpah, Samuel caused lots to be cast; and the lot fell on the Tribe of Benjamin; and when he had caused the Tribe of Benjamin to come near, the lot fell on the house of Kish; and

when the house of Kish was taken, the lot fell on Saul . . . But when they sought him, he could not be found. And when they were about to inquire further, where the chosen of the Lord might be, there came one who said, 'Behold he has hidden himself in the fodder-house of his father's asses'. So they ran and fetched him thence; and Samuel said unto the people, 'Behold, here is the man whom the Lord hath chosen to be King over you'.

Loud and prolonged shouting is heard. The curtain opens on a high-roofed chamber overlooking the place of assembly. At the back is a wide doorway to which steps lead up from below, where unseen by the audience, is a great gathering of the people, still shouting and cheering. ABIAH stands watching them with amusement. JOEL enters, carrying the bowl containing the lots, which rattle as he tosses them up and down. With a common understanding of the situation, the two brothers look at each other and smile.

ABIAH So the chosen of the Lord is now also the chosen of the people. He seems to have pleased them.

JOEL Yes, The casting of the lots went well, didn't it? (*Dipping into the bowl, he proceeds to demonstrate, picking out the three lots in turn*) Benjamin . . . Kish . . . Saul! . . . Marvellous!

ABIAH None of which would have happened, if I hadn't taken Saul's asses. Where did they find him at last?

JOEL In the asses' stable, hiding under the hay.

ABIAH An appearance of unwillingness, which had, as was intended, I suppose, a good effect upon the people.

JOEL Saul's not that sort, Abiah. And, mind you, now that he *is* King, he *will* be King, or I'm much mistaken. Which are you going to serve?

ABIAH (*puzzled*) 'Which?'

JOEL You don't suppose the Old Man's going to give things up willingly, do you? — to Saul or anyone, King or no King . . . Well? The Lord's Prophet, or the Lord's Anointed; which are you going to stand for — now?

ABIAH We can't very well go against our Father, Joel.

JOEL Against him? No. But he is not going to last long. Even these last few days have aged him. And when he goes – where are we then?

ABIAH We are still Judges of Israel.

JOEL Yes, but for how long? . . . What's become of the Old Man?

ABIAH He came in – sharp and quick, just now – and went in yonder – as if something hadn't pleased him.

JOEL No. You saw what happened?

ABIAH No. What?

JOEL When the people started cheering the King, and went on cheering, and forgot to cheer Samuel, he came away . . . Nobody noticed . . . I was sorry for him then.

(There comes a fresh burst of cheers.)

ABIAH They are cheering still.

JOEL Yes. Saul's making himself popular. I don't want to get left. Do you?

(Enter SAMUEL.)

SAMUEL Joel, send Saul to me.

JOEL Send him? How am I to send him, Holiness?

SAMUEL What is your difficulty?

JOEL How does one give orders to a King – saying, 'You are to come!'

SAMUEL I bade him – after I had shown him to the people – to come here to me for further counsel. Tell him that I am waiting.

(JOEL turns to go; then, at the sound of louder cheering, he stops.)

JOEL Nay, here he comes. Look, with what great rejoicing the people are bringing him.

(SAMUEL looks; but what he sees gives him no pleasure.)

You have pleased them well, Holiness, in giving them a King.

SAMUEL *(bitterly)* Yes; in giving them a King, I have pleased them. Go, Joel . . . Go, both of you.

(JOEL and ABIAH go within. SAUL'S head appears; borne

high on the shoulders of the people, he mounts the steps. Half-way up he dismounts; with a gesture dismisses the shouting crowd and comes forward alone. SAMUEL's dignity of pose, and lack of any gesture of welcome, conveys the fact that he has been kept waiting. SAUL's manner is courteous, but neither humble nor apologetic.)

SAUL I should have been here sooner, Holiness; but the people so thronged on me, I could not get away.

SAMUEL (*coldly*) Surely. This is a great day for *them*; and for you also – to be their King.

SAUL It was not of my own will that I was made King, Holiness; yet so to be, surely *is* a great thing. I trust that I shall be found worthy.

SAMUEL The Lord God of Israel will guide thee in the way thou shouldst go.

SAUL So be it Holiness.

SAMUEL My Son – for so surely thou art – since by this hand the Lord anointed thee King – why didst thou hide thyself when the lot fell on thee?

SAUL Holiness, because I was not then sure.

SAMUEL Of what?

SAUL Whether I was truly the chosen of the Lord, or only of my lord Samuel.

SAMUEL What made thee to doubt?

SAUL If I was already the Lord's Anointed, why had the lots to be cast, Holiness?

SAMUEL For the better understanding of the people, my Son. For they might have doubted my word – till the casting of the lots proved it true.

(SAUL *stands silent.*)

What causes thee still to doubt?

SAUL That which I learned concerning my father's asses – that it was not the Lord who brought them to you, but another.

SAMUEL Nay, my Son, it was the Lord's doing; for He uses man to bring to pass that which He wills, though it be done in

ignorance. Before ever they were lost, or found again, the Lord had spoken to me concerning thee . . . Dost thou now doubt, my Son, that it was the Lord's will to make thee King over Israel?

SAUL I will not doubt it, Holiness, when I have proof of it.

SAMUEL What further proof wouldst thou?

SAUL If the people obey my word in all that I command, so that by my hand they are delivered from their enemies, and become a strong nation, then shall I know surely that I *am* the Lord's chosen.

SAMUEL And by what way, and what commands, wouldst thou make them a strong nation?

SAUL I would do this, Holiness. I would make of them one people. For now they are weak, being divided, each tribe caring only for itself; therefore do they fall into the hand of the spoiler. And in our midst there are garrisons of the Philistines. Those garrisons I will drive out.

SAMUEL They are strongly placed and strongly held, my Son.

SAUL Aye. And because none came to our aid when the children of Benjamin went up against them, we were defeated. It shall be so no longer. The cause of one, even of Benjamin the smallest, shall be the cause of all.

SAMUEL Because Benjamin is your tribe, must all serve Benjamin?

SAUL Aye; even as Benjamin will serve them in like case. So shall we no longer be subject to the Philistines.

SAMUEL Have a care, my Son, that you take not too much upon you. Not till you have inquired of the Lord in all these things can they prosper.

SAUL When in doubt, Holiness, I will inquire. But the Lord Himself commanded us to drive out the heathen before us. And to have them here in our midst is contrary.

SAMUEL (*coldly*) Well: what else would you do?

SAUL I will have from every tribe (save only in the days of the harvest) men trained in war to serve under me. So shall

we be strong, and ready for battle, and the nations shall fear us.

SAMUEL Aye! It is as I spoke unto them. 'Ye ask for a King; and instead of peace your King shall give you war; and shall take your sons from their labour in the field that they may serve him; so shall ye be no longer a free people.'

SAUL Without service, Holiness, where is freedom? For if the people will not serve their King, neither can the King serve his people. But already this day five hundred of the young men have offered themselves. Presently it shall be thousands.

SAMUEL The King speaks. What more does he require of his people?

SAUL I will have judges freely chosen of the people, from the men they know and can trust, each for their own city, so that justice be better served.

(This gives SAMUEL a shock, which he endeavours to hide.)

SAMUEL Are not my sons to be judges still?

SAUL If the people choose them, Holiness; but I do not think they will. For it was because of them that they asked' for a King.

SAMUEL Then am I and my house to be nothing in Israel?

SAUL You, Holiness, who are the prophet of the Lord, will speak His word to us.

SAMUEL Which you will obey?

SAUL The word of the Lord I will obey, Holiness.

SAMUEL When the word of the Lord came to Moses, he made it to be law. Wilt thou keep the law of Moses as the law of God for this people?

SAUL Make me to know it, Holiness, and I will keep it; for maybe I do not know all of it.

SAMUEL Even so it is now in Israel. For many have taken wives of the heathen, and come not to Shiloh to worship, nor do they bring their meat-offerings to the Priests, as Moses commanded. And many take usury of their brethren, which

is forbidden; only of strangers may we take usury. Thus has Israel strayed from the right way.

SAUL So long as I am King, I will see that the law of Moses is obeyed, Holiness.

SAMUEL There is another thing. There are yet in this land many diviners, soothsayers, dealers in witchcraft, foretelling hidden things which it is not lawful for man to know – familiar with evil spirits, holding converse with the dead. Moses said, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'. Let the King see to it.

SAUL He *will* see to it, Holiness. Any that he finds dealing in witchcraft – shall die.

SAMUEL So; that is well.

(SAMUEL *is now feeling his way to safety.*)

There was one whom my son Joel set free, whom he should have slain . . .

(*And then a strange thing happens: SAMUEL hears a voice, which SAUL does not – Is it the voice of conscience? Or is it an evil spirit speaking?*)

THE VOICE Your oath, Samuel.

SAMUEL (*after a pause*) Well, thou art King: and the King will do as seems good to him . . . And now, because I am old and weary, and am near my end, I cannot be with thee in all thy goings and comings, as I would wish to be. Therefore, I pray thee, take one of my sons with thee that he may bring word to me, when thou hast need of counsel, and I will send word by him of what the Lord shall say concerning thee and this people.

SAUL I will not take with me thy son, Abiah, Holiness: for him I do not trust. But thy son, Joel, I will take, if it please thee.

(*Outside is a growing murmur of voices from the crowd.*)

VOICES The King! Where is the King? Let the King show himself to his people!

SAUL Holiness, yonder the people are calling for me.

SAMUEL Go to them! Let them be satisfied, while they can be satisfied, in that which they have chosen.

SAUL Will not you come, too, Holiness, that we may stand before them together?

SAMUEL Nay! This is *their* day of triumph, not mine. The Lord has taken from me the Judgeship of his people. Go thy way! When thou hast need of me, come again.

SAUL Farewell, Holiness.

(He goes out. The people greet him tumultuously with shouts of 'God save the King!')

SAMUEL Aye! They rejoice, because I have given them a King; and I am forgotten! . . . Joel, Abiah, my sons! Where are you?

(JOEL and ABIAH come in. They have but to look at SAMUEL to see that things have not gone well.)

ABIAH What has he done, Father?

SAMUEL He has taken your judgment from you. Ye are nothing.

JOEL And you . . . Holiness?

SAMUEL I know not . . . Saul is King . . . The days of the Judges are ended.

ACT II

PROLOGUE

JASHER So Saul was made King and reigned over Israel. And Nahash, the Ammonite, came up and encamped against Jabesh-Gilead to take it; and messengers brought word of it to Saul. And the spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, and he took a yoke of oxen and hewed them in pieces and sent them throughout the coasts of Israel, saying: 'Whosoever cometh not forth to fight for Jabesh-Gilead and to save his brethren from the hand of Ammon, so shall it be done to his oxen also.' And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent, to follow after Saul to battle.

S C E N E 1

ABIAH has remained with SAMUEL in his house at Ramah. It is now a whole year since JOEL has been away in the King's service, and all this time SAMUEL has heard nothing from him; nor has he sent word now of his coming, which takes ABIAH by surprise. The year's separation has had a curious effect: the two brothers have lost something of their old intimacy; it would almost seem as though they have taken sides – not quite; but each knows which side his bread is buttered, and is prepared to act accordingly. In attendance upon JOEL is DOEG THE EDMITE. He takes JOEL's cloak and wallet and retires.

ABIAH So you've come at last, Joel. The Old Man's been waiting for you. How goes it with Israel – and Israel's King?

JOEL The King is accepted of the people, and the kingdom prospers.

ABIAH Is that what you've come to tell him? You should have come sooner.

JOEL Oh! Why?

ABIAH Things have been happening; and you brought no word of them.

JOEL I am now in the King's service, Abiah. And unless he sends me –

ABIAH We are to hear nothing?

JOEL What others have heard, did not you hear also?

ABIAH Aye! We heard that the King had made war upon Ammon. And did not send first to inquire of the Lord by the voice of Samuel, His prophet. The Old Man took to his bed when he heard of it.

JOEL Of the victory?

ABIAH Yes.

JOEL Would defeat have pleased him better?

ABIAH Maybe.

JOEL What's the matter with the Old Man? Does nothing please him?

ABIAH He's losing his teeth, Joel: can't bite any longer; so it makes him vicious. All his life he's loved power; now he's lost it. The people have found one whom they like better.

JOEL You mean Saul?

ABIAH Whom else should I mean? Our father made a mistake, Joel, when he chose Saul to be King.

JOEL The people don't think so.

ABIAH No; that's why. Too much of a King, too little of a servant – that's *his* trouble. I'm sorry for him, Joel – to see his old fingers twitch, and his limbs shake, when word comes of things done that he's had no hand in – wasn't even consulted. Life to him doesn't mean much now. But, mark my word, if he gets the chance, he'll do – someone a mischief; and if a big enough one, he'll die happy . . . What brings you now?

JOEL (*dryly*) The King has sent me to inquire of the prophet Samuel.

ABIAH Well, that's better . . . Pity he didn't do it before.

JOEL It's an inquiry that my lord Samuel won't like.

ABIAH Oh?

JOEL It's that woman again.

ABIAH What of her?

JOEL One telling's enough. Tell his Holiness, Abiah, that I am here on the King's service.

ABIAH No need; here he comes.

(SAMUEL *enters. He has aged, and walks now with a stoop. Seeing JOEL, he halts and grunts. JOEL is evidently out of favour.*)

SAMUEL Oh, so it's Joel. I thought it was his voice . . . What brings you here?

JOEL (*keeping his end up*) The King's command, Holiness.

SAMUEL Oh? 'The King's command'? Has he commands for *me* also?

JOEL He seeks to learn something that you may know, concerning the intentions of the God of Samuel – Holiness.

SAMUEL (*suspiciously*) Was that said to mock me?

JOEL Indeed, no, Holiness. The King knows – only too

well – that about God's ways you know far better than he.

SAMUEL (*tetchily*) Well? What is it?

JOEL A certain woman, charged with witchcraft, was brought before him for judgment – Holiness.

(*This makes SAMUEL sit up.*)

SAMUEL Aye? Did you . . . know this woman?

JOEL Yes, Holiness.

SAMUEL Well?

JOEL He heard the witnesses against her. If what they told was true, it meant death . . . by the law of Moses. (*He pauses.*)

SAMUEL Death, aye, death . . . Well? Is she *not* dead?

JOEL No, Holiness . . . not yet.

SAMUEL Wherefore *not*?

JOEL Before he judged her, he asked – had she anything to say . . . She answered: 'If you slay me for what I am, the curse of Samuel's God be upon you!'

(*This is a hard one for SAMUEL – something he didn't expect. JOEL waits for him to speak.*)

SAMUEL (*warily*) Well? . . . What said he to that?

JOEL Nothing. But I saw the King's countenance change as though he doubted what judgment to give. He ordered her to safe keeping, and has sent me to require that you tell him what she meant.

SAMUEL (*angrily*) How do I know – what she meant? Let the King give his own judgment. Why should he spare one whom Moses said slay?

JOEL Did you not, Holiness, spare one whom Moses said slay?

SAMUEL I spared her on that for which she was brought to me. What she has done since concerns not *me*. Let him do as Moses commanded.

JOEL He cannot do that now, Holiness.

SAMUEL Why not?

JOEL Her keepers say – as truly they believe – that she has escaped by witchcraft: when they came to seek her, she was gone . . . I thought but to do right, Holiness, lest the curse of the God of Samuel should fall upon . . . my lord the King.

SAMUEL (*weighing his words*) So . . . you have let her live! . . . Well, you shall tell your lord the King . . . nothing. Let him answer his own question. But I also have a question for *him*. Answer for him, if you can.

JOEL Yes, Holiness?

SAMUEL When he made war upon Ammon, why did he not send first to inquire of the Lord?

JOEL Had he waited, Holiness, Jabesh-Gilead would have fallen into the hands of the Ammonites, and all would have been slain.

SAMUEL If he had time to call Israel to battle, he had time to call *me*.

JOEL But what was there to inquire about, Holiness?

SAMUEL Am I not the voice of the Lord to this people? Does He not still speak by me? And if there is to be war, must not sacrifice be offered for the blessing of God to be on it?

JOEL The King did make sacrifice, Holiness.

SAMUEL The King? What right had he to make sacrifice, that is neither priest nor prophet?

JOEL Nevertheless, when he so did, the Lord prospered him.

SAMUEL Are you standing up for Saul against your own father?

JOEL You gave me to his service, Holiness. Shall not the servant speak as his master would have him speak?

SAMUEL I gave you to his service to keep watch on him, and bring word to me of all that he purposes: for that and for that only . . . What next has he a mind to do that I am not to know?

JOEL Nothing, Holiness, that you are not to know. The King is about to make war on Amalek; so would have you appoint a day to come and offer sacrifice before the army goes forth.

SAMUEL Oh! He would, would he? So this time he sends for me.

(*He sits thinking.*)

What strength has he now?

JOEL He has already with him three thousand of the tribe of Benjamin; others are coming.

SAMUEL What others? Whence come they?

JOEL All the rest of the tribes from north to south.

SAMUEL How does he get food for so many – coming from far?

JOEL They bring it with them, Holiness, by the King's command – each man enough for himself.

SAMUEL Enough for how long?

JOEL Seven days.

SAMUEL And then?

JOEL When the Amalekites are beaten, and the spoil taken, there will be enough for all.

SAMUEL And if they are not beaten?

JOEL Will not the Lord give victory to His people? . . . So, with all speed, the King bids thee come to offer sacrifice.

SAMUEL He bids me, eh? The King bids the Prophet of the Lord to a war of his own making, and sets him a time! . . . Well, I will come in . . . in seven days.

JOEL Seven days, Holiness, for what is but a day's journey?

SAMUEL I will come when I choose to come – that is, when God tells me to come. I am not this King's servant as thou art. What cause had he to be in such haste? Why did he not send for me first, before this gathering of the people? Bid him tarry till I come.

JOEL In seven days?

SAMUEL Yes: in seven days. And hark you! Tell him this. He is to destroy Amalek utterly – there shall be no sparing of Amalek after that which he did to Israel when he laid wait for him in the way, as he came up from Egypt. Therefore shall all be slain; man and woman, infant and suckling . . . sheep also, and cattle, camel and ass.

JOEL But Holiness!

SAMUEL The Lord has spoken it. If the King is of a mind to know what the Lord would have him do, tell him that! (JOEL *makes as if to speak*) Say no more! I have set him a time. Let him see that he keep to it . . . and wait till I come.

JOEL I will tell him . . . what you say.

(SAMUEL *sits thinking, while JOEL waits. There is something that yet troubles him.*)

JOEL Anything more, Holiness?

SAMUEL Why did you let that woman live, Joel! Nay, it was not the Lord's will that I should hearken to her voice . . . Say to Saul that the curse of Samuel's God will *not* be on him, if upon any found guilty of witchcraft he do as Moses commanded.

JOEL I will do so, Holiness. Farewell, Father.

(SAMUEL *looks at him but makes no answer. Exit JOEL.*)

SAMUEL There goes one – that is my own son, my firstborn, whom I can no longer trust. Saul has stolen him from me . . . He let that woman live! To save Saul from the curse of the God of Samuel . . . It shall not! . . . Listen, Abiah! I will give the King a lesson. Is Samuel, the Prophet of the Lord, to be of no account because Israel has a King? Who made him King? I – by the word of the Lord. And if he obey not His word, when I speak it, he shall be King no more.

(ABIAH *does not respond. Samuel eyes him suspiciously.*)

Well? What have you to say against that?

ABIAH That it will be difficult, Holiness. Saul is no fool: he knows how to make his will pleasing to the people. When he fetched them away from their fields to fight for Jabesh-Gilead, many of them murmured, and said – why should they fight for Jabesh-Gilead when their own borders were safe? But when Saul gave them the spoil – and all the sheep and oxen that were taken, they sang differently then. They went back richer than they came. So now that he sends for them again, they come gladly.

SAMUEL What right had he to take and divide the spoil?

ABIAH It is always done, Holiness.

SAMUEL It shall be done no more. All that is Amalek's shall be had in abomination. They shall take no spoil of Amalek.

ABIAH The people will be disappointed, Holiness.

SAMUEL Let them be! The word of the Lord has been spoken.

(He sits thinking; and now it is with a more set purpose that he speaks.)

In seven days, did I say? Well, should it be more than seven days, the Lord will appoint some other time for the slaying of Amalek. Maybe it is not His will that *Saul* should destroy Amalek, but some other. For surely he that destroys Amalek will be great in the eyes of all Israel; and the people will follow him – not heeding the word of the Lord. Abiah, I have an errand for thee. Joel I can no longer trust: he stands now for Saul. Go to Shiloh, to Ahimelech, the High Priest, and to all the Priests that are there with him; and say to them – from me – that Saul is to be King no more. The Lord shall raise up another in his stead; and the Kingdom shall be taken from Saul, and given to another.

ABIAH To whom will it be given, Holiness?

SAMUEL I know not yet. When it is the Lord's will to make it known, He will tell me.

ABIAH But, Holiness, if Saul hear of it –

SAMUEL How shall he hear of it . . . unless thou tell him of it?

ABIAH How shall he *not* hear of it, if another King be chosen? And if he hear of it, will he not slay?

SAMUEL Slay whom? Think you that any dare slay the Priests of the Lord? If he did, in that day his kingdom would be over. For as the Lord has set Prophet above Priest, so has he set Priest above King, for the ruling of Israel. Therefore, when I say to Ahimelech that Saul is King no more – he is King no more . . . Dost thou doubt?

ABIAH No, Holiness. But for this would it not be better for Ahimelech to come to you himself? For my word, in so great a matter, he might doubt.

SAMUEL Well, so be it. Send Ahimelech to me. Bid him come . . .

(SAMUEL pauses. Across the doorway goes DOEG, moving swiftly and furtively.)

ABIAH *(artfully)* In . . . seven days, Holiness?

SAMUEL Aye, seven days will be time enough. Saul can wait.

(*A sound of galloping is heard. SAMUEL turns to look.*)

Who is yonder man, riding away?

ABIAH (*looking*) That? That is Doeg, the Edomite, one of Saul's servants. He came with Joel.

SAMUEL I will not have any of Saul's servants brought here. Tell Joel that!

ABIAH Yes, Holiness: better that Saul should not know that you have sent for Ahimelech.

SAMUEL It were well he should not. Bid him come – secretly.

ABIAH (*dryly*) Yes, Holiness.

(*SAMUEL looks at him suspiciously.*)

SAMUEL Are *you* faithful, Abiah? Have I one son left to me for comfort in my old age, whom I can yet trust?

ABIAH Surely, Holiness! Why should you doubt *me*?

SAMUEL Nay, I know not whether of all who served me while I judged Israel, there be one left to me. But the Priests of the Lord . . . aye, them I can trust. Go, then, send me Ahimelech.

(*ABIAH goes. The day is now near its end; the air grows dark. SAMUEL stands silent for a while; then speaks.*)

Aye; surely when I let her live I did ill. She has brought a curse upon me. Because I trusted not the Lord Himself to give me the sign of His wrath against Israel. He has shut His mouth at me. I took counsel of Evil; and he has cursed me with a King who heeds not my word. The people follow him. I am forgotten. The shadow of death is round about me; the pains of Hell have got hold upon me . . . Yonder comes darkness of the Heavens (*distant thunder*) and a sound. And I know not the meaning of it – whether it be of good or of evil. (*There comes a faint flash of lightning, followed by distant thunder*) Lord, if it be Thy voice, speak! Let me hear Thee again. (*Thunder*) Surely, it is a voice of wrath . . . Against whom? Is it against Saul, the King? (*He pauses*) Or is it against Samuel, that was Thy prophet? (*Thunder. He trembles and bows himself in fear.*) .

(While he has been speaking the WISE WOMAN has entered, and stands watching him.)

WOMAN What is thy fear, Samuel? *(He starts and turns)* Is it of me? . . . Or of thyself? . . . Or of thy God?

SAMUEL Woman, whence art thou?

WOMAN From the folly of them that fear wisdom and would have me dead.

SAMUEL Why hast thou come to me?

WOMAN Thou didst promise me life. Why, then, does Saul seek to slay me?

SAMUEL I know not. I am not in the King's counsel.

WOMAN Who made him King, Samuel? He that makes Kings – do they not heed his word, and take counsel of him?

SAMUEL He heeds not mine . . . When I promised thee thy life, in that day I had power for life and death. I have it no more. Go, trouble me not. Thy life is in thine own hands. I cannot save thee.

WOMAN So! Thy God has failed thee at last: He believes in thee no more.

SAMUEL Thou blasphemest, Woman!

WOMAN Why therefore shouldst thou believe in *Him*? Nay! what has His wrath against Israel done for thee? It has not given thee back thy power. Thou art become as a dead man. Slay thy God, Samuel! Slay thy God! And thou shalt live again . . . His name? . . . Samuel! Aye, truly, His name is Samuel.

SAMUEL What mean you by that, Woman?

WOMAN Truth; but hard for thee to believe. Yet will I show it thee; and thou shalt see, or be blind, as pleaseth thee best . . . When thou didst seek a sign of God's wrath against Israel, asking for a King – was it the wrath of God, or was it the wrath of Samuel? And if it was Samuel who so visited his wrath on Israel, was not Samuel his own God?

SAMUEL Surely, I was cursed in the day when I first saw thee, and hearkened to thy word!

WOMAN It was thine own curse, Samuel. I cursed thee not.

Nevertheless a curse is on thee now. Thou fearest Saul. *I* also fear him – because of thee. Well, keep thy God; and see that thy God keep *thee* in safety. But I will tell thee a thing ere I go. Saul is become too strong for thee. Thou hast raised up one whom thou canst not pull down. He is King. Thou art forgotten. Hast thou called on thy God to curse him – to give thee another storm? Is this an answer to thy prayer? Or is it . . . nothing? Is this the voice of *thy* God, or . . . of mine?

SAMUEL There is but one God . . . though I hear him no more.

WOMAN How far outside Israel does thy God rule? Among the Gods of the nations, what power has He? Does He show signs and wonders among them? Do they fear Him, that have never heard His name? There is one God that rules all. Him only do I worship and fear. His name? He has no name. He will never be named, for He will never be known. But he is there . . . he is here . . . in thee, and in me; but we know him not . . . though by Him we are known. Farewell, Samuel. Beware of Saul, lest . . . he slay thee also.

(She turns to go.)

SAMUEL Stay . . . Hark, Woman . . . Can thou put a curse upon a man?

WOMAN Can I? No. What need? He puts it upon himself.

SAMUEL How?

WOMAN By fear! . . . If a man fear thee enough, thy curse is on him. If he fear thee not, he is free. For where the sight of a man's eye goes, he goes with it. Where the hearing of his ear can reach, or the sound of his voice, there goes the man also. So, too, the thoughts of a man's heart; where he sends them they go; and he goes with them. For man is not made of flesh and blood only – but of mind and spirit; and from these comes power – whether it be for good or ill. There be evil spirits, and the world is full of them – anger, fear, jealousy, hatred. Wherever they go, they seek to enter and take possession. Dost thou fear Saul? Nay, fear him not! But if Saul fear thee, he is in thy bonds. If he fear thee not – then

is he free of thee; and thy day of power is over . . . Farewell, Samuel.

(She goes.)

SAMUEL So . . . it is Saul that is mine enemy. Surely it repenteth the Lord that he made Saul to be King. Speak, Lord! *(Distant thunder)* Nay, I know not what Thou sayest! O God, if Thou have cursed me with this King because I trusted Thee not, pardon now Thy sorry servant. Let Thy curse be now on him: make him to fear the God of Samuel, and let an evil spirit from the Lord trouble him!

(Thunder. SAMUEL stands listening. He is still not sure whether he does hear the word of the Lord so as to understand it.)

ACT II

SCENE 2

The fight with Amalek is over. SAUL stands in his tent clad in full armour; before him, under a guard of armed men, AGAG, King of the Amalekites, crouches and fawns.

AGAG My life! My life! Grant me my life, and I will serve thee faithfully all my days. Oh, King! Only to live is all I ask.

SAUL *(with a gesture of disgust)* Thy life! Thy life! Take him away! . . . This is no King, but a sheep that I have spared! Oh, God, were I such a King, let me be slain!

(AGAG, struggling feebly, is led out. Saul's armour-bearer begins to disarm him. An attendant offers him a cup of wine: as he drinks a distant blowing of horns is heard. He pauses to listen. JOEL enters.)

JOEL My lord, it is the Holy One.

SAUL *(hotly)* Nay. What purpose brings him now? It is too late. Let him go back: we have no use for him.

JOEL See him, my lord.

SAUL I will not! Why tarried he so long – would you know?

(*At a gesture from SAUL, ARMOURER and CUP-BEARER go out.*)

JOEL I do know, my lord.

SAUL Ha! So you are of his counsel still?

JOEL No, my lord, No! But I know this man that is my own father. My counsel is for my lord, the King. Hear me, my lord!

SAUL Speak, then!

JOEL My lord, for forty years he was Israel's Judge and Ruler. Of all that were before, none was so great: and bitter has it been to him to give up power and rule to another. And now he is old and near his end. Satisfy him this once, my lord, that he may leave you in peace.

(*SAUL is hard to convince.*)

SAUL How – satisfy – him?

JOEL My lord, give him, this last time, that for which he craves – a show of power and authority in the eyes of the people . . . Nay, is he not still the Prophet of the Lord?

SAUL So he says. Comes he with good intent, think you? Or to reprove me – that I did not wait his coming?

JOEL Accept his reproof, my lord; for he has yet power to divide Israel.

SAUL And the will?

JOEL It may be so, my lord.

SAUL If he so wills, he has no part in Israel – not while I am King.

(*And now from a nearer distance, again comes the blowing of horns, followed by sounds of cheering. A MESSENGER enters.*)

MESSENGER My lord, the Holy One.

SAUL Let him come! (*To JOEL*) I will deal with him as he deserves.

JOEL I beseech you, my lord!

SAUL Go, Joel. He is your father; what I have to say to him,

I will say to him alone . . . If he be honest, he has not to fear.

(JOEL, who has his doubts of Samuel's honesty, makes a forlorn gesture, and goes. SAUL stands waiting. Outside are heard the excited murmurs of a great crowd.)

(SAMUEL makes an impressive entry, borne high in a litter upon the shoulders of four LEVITES; and though age and infirmity may be his excuse, it is not his reason: now, as he comes face to face with the King, he occupies the dominating position which he considers to be his right.)

SAUL You come late, Holiness.

SAMUEL I come in the Lord's time, and in the Lord's name, to do the Lord's will, and speak His judgment before Israel.

SAUL You stay too high, Holiness. Come down to earth, that we may meet as man to man.

(SAMUEL, very much upon his dignity, ignores the request, which SAUL proceeds to enforce.)

Levites, set down your load!

(They hesitate. SAMUEL opens his mouth indignantly, as if to speak. SAUL makes a commanding gesture. The LEVITES set down SAMUEL, who, as the litter comes to ground, rises angrily to his feet.)

SAUL (to the LEVITES) Enough. You can go.

(The four LEVITES, unable to withstand the King's command, indicate their higher allegiance by making their bows not to SAUL but to SAMUEL. They go out.)

Again I say – you come late.

SAMUEL The Prophet of the Lord has not to excuse himself to any man.

SAUL Even the Prophet of the Lord should be true to his word, in the service of Israel.

SAMUEL I serve not Israel, but Israel's God; His word only do I obey.

SAUL I also have obeyed His word – spoken by you. Amalek is smitten, and destroyed utterly: and Agag, their King, I have taken alive.

SAMUEL Aye, alive! Was that what the Lord commanded

thee to do? What means, then, this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and this lowing of oxen that I hear?

SAUL It means that when the people go to war they must also be fed. Because we waited your coming, of that which they brought with them nothing was left. Therefore have they spared the best of the sheep and of the cattle for their own need, which was great. Your doing, Holiness. — Also for a sacrifice and a peace-offering to the Lord our God. The rest they have utterly destroyed as I commanded them.

SAMUEL Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offering and sacrifice, as in obeying the Voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

SAUL How could I obey your broken word? Had I waited, when you came not, Israel would have been scattered before the face of the enemy.

SAMUEL Aye, till the Lord chose for Himself another and a better time — and — a better man. Thou hast rebelled against the Word of the Lord; and thy rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and thy stubbornness is iniquity and idolatry. And because thou hast gone thine own way, rejecting the Word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being King.

SAUL That is a hard saying, Holiness, and hard to believe. What is your proof? Was it truly the Lord's will that Israel should be scattered — or was it *yours*? If I am no longer the Lord's Anointed, let Him declare it. Aye! Stand now with me before this people, and tell them that I am no longer their King. Will they believe you? No! Will they not say 'This is no Prophet of the Lord that speaks, when the Lord has given our King victory'?

SAMUEL Aye! So, making thyself great, wouldst thou steal the heart of my people from the Lord their God. I will not! I will hear thee no more. Go thy own way, Saul; and I will go *mine*. Aye, surely this is thy day; and the people follow thee and are glad. But a day will come when they shall *not* follow thee.

(*He turns to go.*)

SAUL Dost thou go to divide Israel? Thou shalt not!

(*He catches hold of Samuel's mantle; it tears in his hand.*)

SAMUEL See! As thou hast lifted thy hand against the Prophet of the Lord, and rent from him his mantle, so hath the Lord rent the Kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and given it to one who is better than thou.

SAUL His name?

SAMUEL Thou shalt know his name in the day when the Lord hath set him over thee to be the strength of Israel.

SAUL Time enough. I will know then.

(*SAMUEL again turns to go.*)

Nay, you go not yet. I have more to say to you.

SAMUEL (*furiously*) I will not hear it! Nay! I will not hear it!

(*But SAUL stands in his way; he cannot go out.*)

SAUL Old man, be silent! It is the King speaks now. Aye, the King! You called me to be God's Anointed: you told me that I was. If I was, I am still: and there is none over me but God Himself. If I am not – then whose? Yours? The Lord God of Israel deliver me from your hand. For your mind toward me is evil, and your hand is against me; And I know well how you have sought to divide Israel from me. But I am King still. If they would have some other I will know of it, and will be King no more. But they shall have no King of *your* choosing. You raised me up in the name of the Lord – truly or falsely. If falsely, *you* shall not cast me down – *not while I live*, saith the Lord!

SAMUEL Is Saul also among the Prophets?

SAUL Aye! For on that same day when you anointed me King, the spirit of the Lord came on me, and I prophesied. And I prophesy again that I will live and die a King, *after you are dead* . . . Nay, be not afraid; *you* I do not slay – for truly the Lord spake by you while yet you judged Israel. But if you teach others to conspire against me, them I will slay without mercy. I will have no traitor in Israel . . . while I am King – be he priest or no. I know what you have done. You sent

your son Abiah to Ahimelech; and Ahimelech came to you secretly, and secretly returned. Was it for that you waited and came not on the day appointed, and would have scattered Israel from before the army of Amalek had I not done your office, and myself offered sacrifice?

SAMUEL What right hadst thou – that art not of the priesthood – to offer sacrifice?

SAUL The same as thou; for neither art thou of the priesthood, nor of the tribe of Levi. But if prophet be priest, then also King is priest when he must lead his people to battle . . . and the prophet came not. But if thou wouldst now – though so late – make sacrifice and peace-offering for the people, and thanksgiving for victory – so be it. Take what thou wilt of that which they have spared of the sheep and the oxen, as many as it may please thee . . . And I will come with thee to the sacrifice.

(This offer does not please SAMUEL, who no longer has any desire to share honours with SAUL; but now he sees his chance and takes it.)

SAMUEL No; I will not; for that which they have spared of Amalek is abomination to the Lord; and no offering shall be made of it. . . . But I will take from thee Agag, their King; and him I will slay. So shall the wrath of the Lord be turned from His people this day, because they and their King obeyed not the Word of the Lord – as spoken by me.

(There is a pause. SAUL sees clearly that SAMUEL is going to score: but he does not take back his offer.)

SAUL So be it. Thou shalt have thy desire. I give thee Agag.

(He claps his hands. A GUARD enters.)

Bring Agag. And bid in again those Levites that stand without.

(The GUARD goes.)

My part is done – Holiness; the rest of this matter is for thee. I come not to thy sacrifice – a poor offering to the Lord thy God is this sheep which calls itself a King. There, yonder he comes.

(SAMUEL instinctively strikes an attitude of dignity for a scene in which he is to be the principal figure. The four LEVITES, followed by JOEL, have entered, and stand waiting for orders. SAUL makes a gesture.)

SAUL Resume your eminence, Holiness. Levites, take up your load.

(SAMUEL seats himself in the litter. The LEVITES hoist him into a position which once more satisfies him. He is now master of a situation which is greatly to his liking. Guarded to right and left, AGAG enters, walking delicately; not yet confronted by the high majesty of SAMUEL, he advances towards SAUL.)

AGAG Now surely the bitterness of death is past.

SAUL Ask yonder man. He will tell thee.

(AGAG turns, and sees now, for the first time, SAMUEL raised up for judgment. Before that Presence all spirit goes out of him.)

SAMUEL Ask not thy life of me, I speak for the Lord God of Israel. This is His Judgment upon thee, and thy doom. As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women.

(AGAG utters a quavering cry, and falls on his knees before SAMUEL.)

AGAG No! No! No!

SAMUEL Lift him! Bind him, and let him be brought after me straightway to the place of sacrifice. There will I hew him in pieces before the Lord.

(AGAG, struggling desperately, is raised and bound. On the shoulders of his LEVITES, SAMUEL makes a stately exit. AGAG and his GUARD follow. As SAMUEL appears before the people, horns are again blown. The shout of welcome increases and becomes tumultuous. SAUL stands looking after him.)

SAUL There goes the show, Joel. Well, I have given him that for which he craved – as you begged of me – to stand great in the eyes of the people. For a great thing it is to have a

King for sacrifice. And hark how it pleases them! Aye, I have given him Agag; but he would have liked better had it been Saul.

JOEL (*horrified*) Oh, my lord. No!

(*But SAUL is sure of it.*)

SAUL He goes to divide Israel.

ACT II

SCENE 3

SAMUEL *has come back to Ramah. It is the third day since his return; no longer wearing his robe of ceremony, he sits wearily waiting for the news which ABIAH has for him. ABIAH, as he lays aside his travelling gear, seems in no hurry to begin.*)

SAMUEL You have come back soon, Abiah. You have seen Joel? Did he send me any – message?

ABIAH No, Holiness.

SAMUEL When is he – coming again?

ABIAH He is not coming again.

SAMUEL Why not?

ABIAH He says the King will not send him.

SAMUEL So it is only the King's word now that he obeys . . . I have done with Joel. You only are left to me . . . What are the people saying, Abiah – about me and the King?

ABIAH There is much talk, Holiness, but little is known. They say that you and the King were at high words together; but nevertheless, that before parting, it pleased the King to give you Agag for sacrifice.

SAMUEL That it pleased him, eh? It did *not*. He came not to the sacrifice. Had it pleased him, would he not have done so?

ABIAH Yea, Holiness – surely. For 'twas a great thing to see

a captive King slain by the Prophet of the Lord for a sacrifice. It pleased the *people*.

SAMUEL Aye. I knew well it would.

ABIAH And for having so done, you are held greatly in honour.

SAMUEL Aye . . . Well, what else have you to tell?

ABIAH After you were gone, the King gave a great feast to all his captains from the spoil that had been taken; and another feast to the people. They feasted till they could feast no more. (*Samuel gives a grunt of disapproval.*) But while he was at the feast, they saw the King's countenance change, as though an evil spirit troubled him. And suddenly, full of wrath, he cried 'Where is that man who would make himself King in my stead?' (*At this Samuel's interest becomes keen.*) They were all astonished, and they said 'There is no such man among us, my lord'. The King said 'If there be such a man, let him see to it: he shall die.'

SAMUEL Oh? He said that, did he?

ABIAH And he went forth alone from the feast. And all wondered what it might mean.

SAMUEL They shall know what it means, – someday . . . someday. And how stands the King now, with the people?

ABIAH He also is held in great honour, Holiness. They say – now that he has destroyed the Amalekites he will destroy the Philistines also; and give Israel peace.

SAMUEL (*angrily*) There shall be no peace for Israel while Saul is King . . . (*He sits thinking.*) Call Jasher to me. There is that which must be written, as the Lord would have it written – ere I die – that Israel may know hereafter of Saul's disobedience, and of how the Lord judged him for it – by me.

ABIAH Holiness, has it been also with Saul as it was with Eli?

SAMUEL What mean you?

ABIAH That your wrath was God's wrath . . . You heard no Voice?

SAMUEL I heard – no Voice.

ABIAH (*quoting*) 'Nevertheless, had I not told him of the

Voice, Eli would not have believed me'. Did you tell Saul, Holiness?

SAMUEL What I told Saul, you shall hear. Call Jasher.

(ABIAH goes, and presently returns followed by JASHER.)
Aye, Israel shall know how the Lord has spoken by me . . . Sit down, Jasher. Take your tablets and write. Write it in brief, and copy afterwards.

(JASHER sits down, and makes ready with his tablets. ABIAH stands attentive to what follows; and presently one perceives that he knows a good deal more of what actually happened between SAUL and SAMUEL, when they were alone together, than SAMUEL suspects. Possibly JOEL was his informant – a tent not being sound-proof when voices become loud. And so, when SAMUEL reshapes the story to his better liking, ABIAH'S eyes turn on him curiously – and knowingly.)

SAMUEL (*dictating*) Then came the word of the Lord to Samuel, saying 'It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be King, for he hath turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments'.

(*This gives JASHER a shock; for, since their first meeting, he has loved SAUL greatly; and as he continues to write at Samuel's dictation, his grief and consternation become greater.*)

'And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night'. . . . Yes, it gave me a sleepless night, Abiah.

ABIAH (*smoothly*) I can well believe it, Holiness.

SAMUEL Yes: I wore myself out, praying that the Lord would repent Him. But He would not. Go on, Jasher. 'And Samuel rose up early, and went to meet Saul that had gone before to Gilgal. And Saul said unto him – ' . . . When I came before Saul, Abiah, your brother Joel was with him – with others; but Saul made them all go forth from before him – fearing, I doubt not, what the Lord would have me say to him. . . .

'And Saul said unto him'. . . . (Go on, Jasher) . . . 'Blessed be

thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' . . . (Yes, that's what he said, Abiah) . . . 'And Samuel said 'What meaneth, then, this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of oxen that I hear?' And Saul said 'They have brought them from the Amalekites, and have spared the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God. Also they have brought Agag their King captive, and the rest we have destroyed utterly.' (To ABIAH) – They had not. They had not – 'And Samuel said, 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offering as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Now, because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being King' . . . Go on, go on, Jasher! What are you stopping for? . . . (To ABIAH) I doubt not Saul was glad then that he had sent all forth from before him, ere that word was spoken. And mark you, now, his answer – heard only by *me*; but this shall make it known – hereafter . . . 'And Saul said unto Samuel, 'I have sinned, and have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, spoken by thee, because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.'

(This is so out of character for SAUL, that ABIAH and JASHER both open their mouths in astonishment. But it is only his own character that SAMUEL cares about; and he continues to dictate:)

'Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me that I may worship the Lord thy God, and be held in honour before the people.' And Samuel said 'I will not turn with thee.' And as Samuel turned about to go, Saul laid hold of the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said 'So hath the Lord rent the Kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and given it to another that is thy better.' (Then to ABIAH) And when he would have me tell him who that might be, I would not – for I do not yet know. The Lord will show it me, when the time has come to declare it. 'Then', said Samuel, 'Bring hither to me Agag, the King of the Amalekites.' And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said 'Surely the bitter-

ness of death is past.' And Samuel said, 'As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women.' And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.'

(Having finished his piece, Samuel rises, and as he turns to go, says to ABIAH in a tone of great satisfaction:)

SAMUEL There, Abiah; What do you think of that?

ABIAH Fine, Holiness! Fine!

(SAMUEL is about to go out, when he sees Jasher, his head bowed with grief, and his hand faltering as he writes. He pauses, returns, and then, laying his hand gently on Jasher's shoulders, he says:)

SAMUEL And now you may add this, Jasher: 'And Samuel came no more to see Saul, until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, that the Lord repented that he had made Saul King over Israel. . .

(He goes out. JASHER ceases to write, and bows his head over his tablets in a passion of weeping. ABIAH goes up to him, and slapping his back with kindly jocosity, says:)

ABIAH The Word of the Lord, Jasher! The Word of the Lord! Is it not written in the book of the Prophet Samuel?

ACT III

PROLOGUE

JASHER *(speaks before the curtain)* Now after Samuel had parted from Saul, an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord command, therefore, that we seek out a man who is a cunning player on the harp, so that when the evil spirit is upon thee, he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.' And Saul said 'Where wilt thou find me such a man? Then answered one of his servants, and said, 'There is a son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, named David

that is cunning in playing – a valiant man, and a man of war, prudent in speech, and of a goodly countenance; and the Lord is with him.’ And Saul said ‘Send him to me.’ So David came to Saul, and stood before him; and Saul loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit was upon Saul, that David took a harp and played with his hand; and the evil spirit departed from him.

S C E N E 1

The curtain opens, and discloses SAUL seated in a large tent: with his armour lying beside him. The sides of the tent are of dark red. There is no light; only from a brazier at his feet comes a dull red glow: For a while there is dead silence; then from a distance comes the sound of marching; it is the guard. At the word of command, it halts outside the tent; the guard is changed; the pass-word is given and repeated: ‘Let the King live’. At the word of command the marching is resumed, and dies slowly away; and again there is dead silence. The flap of the tent is lifted softly; DAVID enters; he carries a harp in his hand. He stands looking at SAUL.

SAUL Who is there?

DAVID Your servant David, my lord.

SAUL Come in . . . Come nearer . . . Stand by me.

(DAVID goes and stands beside SAUL.)

See you yonder man?

DAVID I see no one, my lord.

SAUL An old man . . . with eyes of wrath . . . he stands looking at me. And in his hand he holds a mantle that is rent.

DAVID No, my lord: there is no such man here.

SAUL You do not look in the right place. Come! Look at me! Look! Look! Into my eyes . . . Can you not see him now?

DAVID No, my lord.

(But his voice has faltered.)

SAUL *(searchingly)* What did you see?

DAVID Pardon, my lord . . . I saw . . . Fear.

SAUL Of what?

DAVID I know not, my lord.

SAUL (*violently*) Nay, tell me! Of what? Of what?

DAVID I know not whether it be of yourself, my lord, or of another. A King should fear only God.

SAUL Aye! But if *he* speaks for God, then is God my enemy.

DAVID God is the enemy of no man who trusts Him, my lord.

SAUL I did trust . . . I did trust. But if Israel be divided and fall a prey to the enemy – whom then can I trust? Neither God, nor man . . . God nor man. See there! He is beckoning to you with his hand. (*Challengingly*) Are *you* faithful, David – to your King?

DAVID My lord! My lord!

SAUL Look me in the eyes! Show me your face!

(*SAUL takes hold of him and draws him close – eye to eye.*)

SAUL You look honest. Oh, were you to deceive me, you my sweet singer and comforter, there would be none left whom I could trust. (*A sort of convulsion takes hold of him*) Death! Death! For all that rise up against me, it *shall* be death.

(*DAVID leaves him; sits down at a little distance, takes up his harp and plays. At first SAUL seems to take no heed; he sits staring wildly into vacancy; but gradually relaxes; slowly his head sinks, his clenched hands fall to rest, all his fear and wrath have gone out of him. Presently, in a low voice, DAVID begins to sing:*)

DAVID The Lord is my shepherd; therefore shall I lack nothing.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, and leadeth me beside the still waters.

He shall restore my soul, and bring me into paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;

For Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me against them that trouble me.

Thou anointest my head with oil, and my cup runneth over.

Thy goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

(Slowly SAUL raises his head, and rises to his feet. A soft faint light streams over him. He makes a gesture. DAVID comes forward and kneels at his feet. SAUL reaches down and lays his hands upon David's head.)

SAUL Oh, thou voice of my comfort, thou light to the darkness of my soul! What is this thou hast done for me? The pit that had opened before me has shut its mouth. And him that I feared, I fear no more . . .

(DAVID takes Saul's hand and kisses it. Slowly the curtain closes.)

ACT III

SCENE 2

In the dim light of his chamber SAMUEL lies sleeping. In a dream he sees the WISE WOMAN of Endor, and hears her speaking.

WOMAN Art thou still sleeping, Samuel?

SAMUEL Oh, cursed woman! Why have you come here to trouble me again?

WOMAN Maybe, I am not here. Maybe, I am only a dream sent to thee — by the Lord.

SAMUEL Nay! Wherefore should He send *thee*? For surely thou art an evil thing, and hast been a curse to me since the day when I took counsel of thee.

WOMAN Does not the Lord thy God send evil as well as good?

Cannot He that blesses curse also? Is not that evil spirit which is now upon Saul – also from the Lord – and thee? . . . Aye! didst thou not pray that the Lord should send it? Well, He has sent it: To what end? That Saul should fear the God of Samuel. 'Twas a wise prayer, Samuel; for if Saul fear *thy* God, he fears thee also . . . You made too much of a King when you made Saul, Samuel. Yet would he be more of a King – and thou so much the less – did he *not* fear thee. . . .

SAMUEL Why does he fear me?

WOMAN Because he is an honest man – more honest than thou art. And there has come to him a doubt whether he was truly the chosen of the Lord, or only the chosen of Samuel . . . Which was he? . . . Look yonder! See how he sits, throned, and crowned. With the weapons to his hand wherewith he has fought valiantly for the strength of Israel . . . What is that shadow that has fallen upon him? Why is his face darkened and his heart troubled? The curse of Samuel's God – whom he fears – is upon him.

(Faint music is heard.)

SAMUEL Who is that – sitting at his feet, and playing upon a harp?

WOMAN A man named David, that has come to take thy curse from him . . . Have a care for David, Samuel: – have a care! For if David serve Saul faithfully, and take thy curse from him, Saul will fear thee no more.

(As she speaks her form begins to fade and grow dim.)

SAMUEL Where art thou going, Woman?

WOMAN To mine own place, the rock wherein I have hid myself from them that seek after my life to slay me . . . Was it for *that* that you made Saul my enemy? . . . Farewell, Samuel.

(She disappears. SAMUEL lies for a while without motion, still sleeping. Then he stirs, rouses himself, and calls:)

SAMUEL Caleb . . . Caleb.

(His old servant CALEB enters; and through the opening door comes a gleam of daylight.)

CALEB You called, Holiness?

SAMUEL Caleb, get me up. Help me to rise.

(CALEB *raises him from the bed*, SAMUEL *sits up*. CALEB *brings a cloak, and lays it over his knees*.)

Let in the light, Caleb.

(CALEB *throws back the shutters, letting in the cold light of early day*.)

Send Abiah to me.

CALEB Will you not now have something to eat, Holiness?

SAMUEL Presently; not yet.

(CALEB *goes*. SAMUEL *sits waiting*. ABIAH *enters*.)

ABIAH Have you had a good night, Holiness?

SAMUEL A good night? I know not . . . No. I have had a dream which troubles me.

ABIAH Why should a dream trouble the Holy One of Israel? Are not all dreams from God?

SAMUEL No . . . not all. There be dreams that come of Evil . . . Who is this man — David?

ABIAH (*surprised*) David? From whom have you heard tell of him, Holiness?

SAMUEL The Lord has bid me inquire concerning him. Who is he?

ABIAH He is Saul's chosen servant and armour-bearer; also his musician. And when Saul's trouble is upon him —

SAMUEL His trouble?

ABIAH That evil spirit which now afflicts him —

SAMUEL Aye?

ABIAH — This man David goes in alone to him, when no one else dare, and plays to him . . . Also they say that Jonathan, the King's son, loves him greatly.

SAMUEL Whence comes he?

ABIAH He is of the tribe of Judah, a son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite.

SAMUEL What brought him to Saul? How came he to know of him?

ABIAH First it was but by report, for the healing of the

King's malady, by his playing upon the harp. Till then he was only a keeper of sheep; but already a mighty man of valour – by his own account. One hears tales of him which are hard to believe.

SAMUEL Is he young?

ABIAH Yes, Holiness. A year ago he was hardly more than a boy; but now he is a full man, and wise beyond his years.

SAMUEL (*suspiciously*) How come you to know so much of him, while I know nothing?

ABIAH I had it from Joel.

SAMUEL (*ill-pleased*) So you have been to see Joel?

ABIAH Yes, Father.

SAMUEL Why? I did not send you.

ABIAH No, Father. But is not Joel still my brother? And from him I hear things that it is well you should know, Holiness.

SAMUEL What should I know?

ABIAH Because he believes that you are of a mind to divide Israel, the king has set a watch upon you. I was to warn you of that, Holiness.

SAMUEL So, it has come to that! – The man whom I made to be King thinks to set a watch on me. Well, that also shall go to his unmaking – when the Lord hears of it.

ABIAH I think you came to the making of him too late, Holiness.

SAMUEL What mean you?

ABIAH To shape a King as you would have him be, you must catch him young. Saul was already too much his own master when you first took measure of him . . . I warned you, Father.

SAMUEL How did you warn me?

ABIAH When I told you how he had withstood me in the seat of Judgment, you praised him for it. Well, you have learned better since.

SAMUEL Go to! Are you daring to teach your Father?

ABIAH (*dryly*) No; only *learning* him.

SAMUEL Tell me more of this – David.

ABIAH It could be better told, Holiness, by those that are better able to believe what he tells of himself. But if what the boy has told be true, and if out of the boy comes the man, David is like to become the light of Israel.

SAMUEL Aye?

ABIAH While yet a keeper of his father's sheep he did – so he says – what no living man has yet done: took a lion, and a bear, by the throat (not on the same day, maybe) and tore the life out of them. Even Samson could not do that: he needed the jawbone of an ass to do it with.

SAMUEL You are wrong, Abiah; it was with the jawbone of an ass that Samson slew – not the lion, but a thousand Philistines.

ABIAH Was it so? Then, like enough, with his own jawbone David will some day do the same; for he seems able to make people believe whatever he chooses to tell them. And that, surely, is a gift which comes only from the Lord – Eh, Holiness?

SAMUEL Abiah, you have an evil mind. You mock at things which are holy. If the Lord is with David, He *is* with him. Aye! God works wonders in them whom He has chosen – to raise up.

ABIAH Did He so, when He raised up Saul, Holiness?

SAMUEL Whom he raises – if he do ill – He shall also cast down . . . So now Saul is troubled of an evil spirit, eh? – Doubt not it comes from God.

ABIAH Does God send evil on men, Holiness?

SAMUEL On them that do evil – yes.

ABIAH Then is David doing the will of God, Holiness, when he drives it away?

SAMUEL What is it that he does? How does he – drive it away?

ABIAH How, I know not. He seems to have a gift of enchantment. When Saul's trouble is upon him he plays and sings to him, and presently the evil spirit departs, and Saul's mind comes back to him.

(SAMUEL *sits thinking.*)

SAMUEL Is David always with him?

ABIAH No, Holiness. When the King no longer needs him, he goes back home to the care of his father's sheep. He is there now, so Joel tells me.

SAMUEL At Bethlehem?

ABIAH Yes, Holiness.

(And now SAMUEL has an attack of plenary inspiration. Usually he has these in private; but on this occasion ABIAH is the privileged witness.)

SAMUEL Abiah, the Word of the Lord has come to me. He has told me what He would have me do. I will take David from Saul. For surely it is not the Lord's will that Saul should be free from that evil spirit which now troubles him . . . Fetch me my horn, and fill it with oil. Also tell Caleb to saddle the ass, and to be ready himself to go with me. Bid him prepare food for the journey.

ABIAH Where are you going, Holiness?

SAMUEL Where the Lord sends me. You also, Abiah, shall go to Ahimelech and tell him to come to me – quickly.

ABIAH Again, Holiness?

SAMUEL Aye, again. For what the Lord had not then shown me of that which He purposed, now He has declared it. Say to Ahimelech that Saul is King no more. The Lord has chosen another in his stead; and the Kingdom is taken from Saul, and given to him . . . My horn, my horn, Abiah!

(ABIAH goes out.)

Yes, Lord, now plainly I do hear Thee again – speaking to me as of old. Thou hast pardoned my unfaithfulness, and the curse of the wicked one thou wilt take from me. I go to do Thy will; to anoint David to be King.

ACT III

SCENE 5

The same scene. ABIAH and JOEL are alone together.

ABIAH You should not have come, Joel. Our Father is now so bitter against you, that when I told him I had been to see you, he was angry.

JOEL Why?

ABIAH Because now you are the King's man, and his no longer.

JOEL I have more cause to be bitter against him. If he goes on the way he is going, my life will no longer be safe to me.

ABIAH Not safe?

JOEL No. That I am my Father's son is now cause enough for the King to suspect me. Why does he still so itch for power that he cannot leave well alone? He has had a full life; and for what he did for Israel in his day men hold him in honour. But his day is over. Why cannot he gather up his old feet, and die in peace? . . . What is he doing now?

ABIAH Nothing that I am supposed to know.

JOEL Is it nothing that between him and Ahimelech there are comings and goings? – for what cause, think you?

ABIAH May not Priest take counsel of Prophet, Brother, to know the Lord's will concerning Israel?

JOEL Why so secretly? Why by night?

ABIAH (*startled*) Does the King know that?

JOEL Yes: and charges it to *me* that I know also.

ABIAH How comes he to know?

JOEL As I told you – because he no longer trusts me, he has taken others to his service, who bring word to him . . . You also, Abiah, may not be as safe as you think yourself. That is why I have come.

ABIAH What is it the King knows – or thinks to know?

JOEL Only that he is out to divide Israel.

ABIAH Aye, that is true. By what way?

JOEL Why do you question of that which surely you know? To the Priests at Shiloh has not word gone that, sometime, there is to be – another King?

ABIAH Is to be?

JOEL Yes What do you know about that, Abiah?

ABIAH (*deciding to make a clean breast of it*) Is –

JOEL Who? Who?

ABIAH David.

JOEL Oh! but impossible!

ABIAH Why?

JOEL David is the King's right-hand man; Saul loves and trusts him . . . He brings him comfort in his affliction.

ABIAH (*smoothly*) Yes?

JOEL He is to marry the King's daughter. And he and Jonathan, the King's son, are as brothers – so great is their love for each other.

ABIAH Yes: very like; all that you say is true. And that is *why*. You do not know our Father as well as I do, Joel. When he heard of David, and of how greatly Saul loved and trusted him, he said: 'I will take David from Saul'.

JOEL But – does David know?

ABIAH I have already told you: David is King.

JOEL So Samuel the Prophet has chosen David, the Giant-Killer, for the dividing of Israel! . . . Had I known *that*, I should have feared to come, Abiah.

ABIAH Joel – how big, really, was that man, Goliath, whom David slew?

JOEL Not so big as they say: but big.

ABIAH Taller than Saul?

JOEL Oh, yes: he was taller than Saul. But he was a great fat fellow, and broad; and that made him look much bigger. And now that he's dead rumour has done the rest, adding as many cubits to his stature as it can get people to believe . . . It wasn't quite fair, you know, the way David killed him: didn't give him a chance. But it was clever . . . Tell me,

Abiah; was he *then* already Samuel's and the Lord's anointed?

ABIAH Yes.

JOEL He kept his secret well! And well for him that he did. If ever Saul comes to know of it, David is a dead man – and deserves to be!

ABIAH Our Father was right: you are all for Saul now, Joel.

JOEL I'm all for my own skin; and you had better be for yours. Can you not see the peril we stand in? I had no hand in it; but *you* – you knew of it. And if you knew of it, will Saul believe that I did not know also?

ABIAH Are you going to tell Saul?

JOEL No. And therein lies my danger if he hears of this day's meeting. I would that I had not come. Oh, what a fool a wise man can be. Does our Father think that he can now take back the Kingdom from Saul – a King loved by the people? Can you not persuade him to cease meddling in things which no longer concern him, and from troubling Israel?

ABIAH No, Joel; he can't be persuaded of anything, except that he is the Prophet of the Lord, and that those who do not obey his word must be cast down and destroyed.

(JOEL *sighs angrily.*)

JOEL How long has he yet to live, Abiah?

ABIAH As long, maybe, as he has the will for it. For though now so feeble, that scarcely can he rise from his bed, his will is as strong as ever.

JOEL What does he do with himself now?

ABIAH He is still writing, by the hand of Jasher, his Book of the Judges. When that is finished, maybe he will have the will to depart in peace.

JOEL If it is to be in peace, it were well for him that he goes soon: – for you and for me also. I'm going, Abiah. You were right, I should not have come. If the King does find out, I will send word to you – if I am spared to do it . . . Pity, Abiah, that you and I could not also have been prophets of the Lord.

ABIAH Why?

JOEL It would have been safer.

(And now, very feebly, on stumbling feet, and clinging to the door-post for support, SAMUEL enters. At the sight of JOEL he trembles with rage.)

SAMUEL So your master has sent you to spy on me! Go! Go! You are no longer my son! The curse of the Lord God be upon you!

(He can say no more; he makes a gesture of dismissal. JOEL stands looking at him for a moment in a silence which is eloquent. It is to ABIAH he speaks at last.)

JOEL Farewell, Abiah.

(He turns abruptly, and goes out; and presently the galloping of hoofs is heard.)

ABIAH Holiness, you do Joel a great wrong. He came only to warn you.

SAMUEL Of what?

ABIAH Of your peril, when Saul comes to know of what you have done – making David King.

SAMUEL If I do the Lord's will, whom shall I fear? . . .

(ABIAH does not answer. SAMUEL looks out to watch Joel's departure.)

Who is that man – following after Joel?

(ABIAH looks, and starts, for he sees danger.)

ABIAH That is – Doeg, the Edomite.

SAMUEL The man who came with him before; and that I said was not to come again?

ABIAH Yes: but this time he did not come with him: nor have they gone back – together.

SAMUEL So! This is the watch that Saul has set on me. H'm!

ABIAH And now also on Joel, Holiness; because he has come to warn you.

SAMUEL I need no warning of Joel. The Lord is my Keeper.

(He sits thinking.)

Abiah, send word to David – 'Beware of Doeg, the Edomite'.

ABIAH Yes, Holiness.

SAMUEL Take me back to my bed, Abiah. Maybe this is the

last time . . . the last time that I shall rise from it – now that I have done the Lord's Will.

(ABIAH supports him back to his bed, from which he will not rise again.)

ACT IV

SCENE 1

SAUL sits in his tent, not in full state, but it is as a warrior-King that one sees him: to right and left stands his shield-bearer and sword-bearer; and by his side piled armour and a stack of javelins. Before him stand JOEL, and DOEG, the Edomite.

SAUL Answer me! Who is it that now you serve – King Saul or King Samuel?

JOEL My lord, you only do I serve.

SAUL This man tells me that, two days since, he followed you to your Father's house at Ramah.

JOEL It is true that I went there, my lord. I did not know that he had followed me.

SAUL Nor were you meant to know.

JOEL But I did know, my lord, that you no longer trusted me. Therefore – for my own safety – I should not have gone.

SAUL Why did you go?

JOEL For *his*, my Lord. For though I no longer serve him, he is yet my father.

SAUL And was that to do *me* service?

JOEL Yes, my lord. I went to warn him that he should no longer meddle in matters which concern only the King.

SAUL You ask me to believe that?

JOEL You will believe it, my lord, when I tell you that he would not hear me, ordered me away – never to see his face

again. Aye! cursed me bitterly for being your servant – not his . . . He is dying, my lord; he can do nothing more than what he has done already. Let him die in peace.

SAUL Peace? . . . Let that wait . . . (*to DOEG*) What more have you to report?

DOEG My lord, that there is now one whom he has already chosen to be King – in your stead, my lord.

SAUL (*to JOEL*) What say you to that?

JOEL (*doing the best he can for himself*) I heard it, but I did not believe it, my lord. No, my lord.

SAUL 'Chosen' you say?

DOEG And *anointed*, my lord.

SAUL (*controlling his rage*) Who is the man?

DOEG I fear to tell you, my lord. Let him tell you (*pointing to JOEL*); he knows.

JOEL I did not believe it, my lord.

SAUL (*furiously*) His name! His name!

DOEG David, my lord.

SAUL (*springing to his feet*) You lie, Devil! You lie! (*He seizes DOEG violently*) Swear to me that you lie, and I will not slay you for it.

DOEG No, my lord, no! I speak truth. It is David, my lord.

JOEL (*still saving himself*) It cannot be true, my lord.

SAUL What proof have you? What proof? You saw it done?

DOEG No, my lord. But I heard him tell my Lord Abiah, when he returned, that David was to be King. Also, my lord, he had sent word to Ahimelech and the Priests, telling them. And by them the people are to be taught that presently the Lord will send them another King.

(*SAUL stands searching for the truth. He turns to JOEL.*)

SAUL And you. Were you told that it was – David?

JOEL I was told, my lord; but I could not believe it.

SAUL . . . 'Another King' . . . When was this done?

DOEG Ten days since, my lord.

SAUL Where?

DOEG At Bethlehem, at his father's house, my lord.

SAUL Aye. He asked leave of me to go . . . I gave him leave . . . Three days later he returned . . . Said nothing.

SAUL . . . He sang to me; aye, sang, and played, even as before; and as I heard him, I was refreshed and comforted . . . (*then, furiously*) Oh! It cannot be true! Prove it to me! If you cannot prove it, you die!

DOEG My lord – that it is true there is *one* that knows.

SAUL Who?

DOEG Your own son, the Prince – Jonathan.

(*This is too much for SAUL to believe.*)

SAUL Jonathan! Jonathan *knows* that over him, David is to be King! How should *he* know? *He?*

DOEG My lord, so great is the love of the King's son for David that he denies him nothing; and between them nothing is hid. I saw him – three days since – take the gold circlet from his head and set it upon David's. Also he stripped off his robe, and sword and bow and girdle, and put them upon David. Surely, in so doing, he knew. I speak truth, my lord.

(*SAUL signs to an Attendant standing without. He enters.*)

SAUL Send Jonathan to me.

(*The Attendant goes. There is a long pause. SAUL waits, saying nothing. JOEL and DOEG look at him with fear; his face is terrible. Presently JONATHAN enters.*)

When did you last see David?

JONATHAN But now, my lord.

SAUL Send him to me.

JONATHAN He is no longer here, my Lord. He has gone.

SAUL Where?

JONATHAN To Bethlehem.

SAUL Again?

JONATHAN Yes, my lord; for the day of the yearly sacrifice at his father's house. He asked that he might go.

SAUL He did not ask leave of me that he should go.

JONATHAN No, my lord, he asked leave of me. I gave it.

SAUL (*to DOEG*) Saw you David, as you came in hither?

DOEG Yes, my lord.

SAUL Did he speak to you?

DOEG No, my lord. He looked at me, turned quickly, and went.

SAUL (*to JONATHAN*) And that he might get himself safely hence, came not to me, but to *thee*! Oh, thou son of a blind father, born of evil; now I know surely that thou hast taken this son of Jesse to be thy lord, and hast made thyself his servant, that he may take the Kingdom from thee when I am gone. Not while I live shall he live to do it: or thou! Send! Fetch him back to me, that this day he may die – and Israel be saved from the hand of Samuel.

JONATHAN Nay, my lord! What has he done that he should die?

SAUL For this – for this! That thou and he are so much one, that slaying thee, I slay him also. Die!

(SAUL *snatches up a javelin and is about to hurl it at Jonathan. His ARMOUR-BEARER beats it aside. JONATHAN runs out.*)

ARMOUR-BEARER No, my lord, no! Slay me, but not your son! Not my lord Jonathan!

(SAUL *throws him down, takes up another javelin, and hurls it after JONATHAN.*)

SAUL After him! Seize him! Let him not escape!

(*He staggers; seizes shield and sword from the two BEARERS, as they run out, followed by JOEL and DOEG. A red darkness begins to fall upon the scene. He lets shield and sword fall, strength goes out of him.*)

SAUL Oh, God, why hast thou smitten me where I am weakest, in them that I love? . . . David . . . Jonathan . . . my son . . . my comforter.

(*And now, as the Evil Spirit takes hold of him, we see, as SAUL sees. Darkness gathers round him; and in the darkness come flashes of light; and in those flashes figures move before his eyes and vanish. He sees Samuel, Agag, David – hears confused voices from the past: Agag pleading for his life: Samuel speaking the 'Word of the*

Lord': the Wise Woman of Endor. 'If you slay me for what I am, the curse of Samuel's God be upon you.'
SAMUEL: *'Be not concerned for thy father's asses. The Lord has rent the Kingdom of Israel from thee, and given it to another.'* DAVID: *'The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore shall I lack nothing.'* *And along with these mixed visions and voices, comes a sound of rising wind that wails and shrieks, as the darkness closes down deeper and deeper. Suddenly, out of the darkness, comes Saul's voice.)*

SAUL Ahimelech! Send me Ahimelech.

(There comes a roll of thunder, and a sudden flash of lightning. In it SAUL is seen standing, sword lifted, a figure of wrath and vengeance. The darkness closes down again.)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE 2

In Samuel's house at Ramah, night is falling. ABIAH is seated at a table on which stands an unlighted lamp. JASHER, with a large scroll in his hand, stands before him.)

JASHER The book, he says, is finished. Here is the last of it. When I had written so far, and was yet waiting (I waited a long time, my lord) 'That is all,' he said, 'You need write no more. The days of the Judges of Israel are ended'.

(ABIAH has taken the scroll, and is reading it.)

ABIAH It ends strangely, Jasher.

JASHER I think, my lord, he would have written more, had he been able.

ABIAH Well, the Book of Judges is written; but who is going to write the Book of Samuel? . . . You, Jasher?

JASHER (*with a curious coldness*) No, my lord. I could not write it as my lord Samuel would have it written. What he would have me write for him is done. Is it your wish, my lord, that I should come again to-morrow?

ABIAH There will be no need, Jasher. Light the lamp before you go.

(JASHER *lights the lamp*. ABIAH *takes up the scroll, and is about to read it; as JASHER opens the door to go out, he pauses.*)

What is the night going to be, Jasher?

JASHER A dark night, my lord.

(ABIAH *turns back to the reading of the scroll*. JASHER *looks back at him, then goes without speaking.*)

ABIAH (*reading*) 'And in those days there was no King in Israel; and every man did that which was right in his own eyes . . . Here endeth the Book of the Judges, written from the mouth of my lord Samuel by the hand of his servant Jasher' . . . Yes, surely, the days of the Judges *are* ended. And now there are two Kings in Israel . . . Which of them are you going to serve, Abiah?

(*He gets up, and closes the shutters.*)

Aye, a dark night – when the light of Israel goes out.

(*From the inner room, from which there comes a faint light, CALEB enters hastily.*)

CALEB My lord Abiah, will you come? The Holy One calls for you.

ABIAH What? Already awake again?

CALEB No, my lord. It is in his sleep that he calls for you.

ABIAH Then what use my coming?

CALEB Oh, my lord, in his sleep the Holy One says things which frighten me.

ABIAH Frighten you? Why?

CALEB It is as if, in his sleep, some evil spirit troubled him . . . I fear to be alone with him, my lord.

ABIAH What is it you hear him say?

CALEB It is not his own voice that speaks, my lord. Yet out of his mouth I hear it – ‘Where is the God of Samuel? Where is the God of Samuel?’ And then – ‘Your oath, Samuel!’ And then his own voice comes back to him, and he cries out for you, and for my lord Joel to come to him.

ABIAH For Joel, you say?

CALEB Yes, my lord.

ABIAH Well, go back to him. I will come presently.

CALEB Come soon, my lord.

ABIAH (*impatiently*) Yes, yes. Go! I will come.

(CALEB goes. ABIAH stands in thought for a while.)

ABIAH So he calls also for Joel? Strange! ’Tis well, then, that I have already sent for him . . . ‘Where is the God of Samuel?’ Aye, where? Has he begun to have a doubt? . . . ‘Your oath, Samuel.’ What oath?

(*A sound of galloping is heard; it comes to a halt. The door is flung open. JOEL enters in great haste and agitation.*)

Joel! Here already? I did not think my message could have reached you so soon.

JOEL I got no message. I came to save myself – my life!

ABIAH From whom?

JOEL The King. He is mad, mad, mad!

ABIAH Mad?

JOEL Aye – for blood! Never was such madness known! All tremble that hear of it. It cries to God that such a thing could be done in Israel, and the doer thereof – live!

ABIAH What has he done?

JOEL He has slain the Priests. Ahimelech is dead, and all with him, save one.

ABIAH Oh, horrible!

JOEL Aye, horrible, most horrible!

ABIAH Have you seen the King?

JOEL Nay, for when I heard of it, I fled. For my own life I feared, being Samuel's son: for if Ahimelech and the Priests be slain, what life can be safe?

ABIAH This will kill our father, when he hears of it.

JOEL It may well! – for it is his doing.

ABIAH His? What mean you?

JOEL Who else made David King; and sent word of it to Ahimelech? Doeg has told of it . . . David, fleeing from Saul, sought help of Ahimelech; and the old man gave him shelter and food, and armed him with the sword of Goliath, and sent him safely away – to King Achish of Gath. When the King heard that, madness came on him; he ordered Ahimelech and the Priests to be brought before him. And what does Ahimelech do? Withstands Saul to his face – and praises David as a faithful servant of the King! That was enough! The King gave command, and Ahimelech and the Priests are slain.

ABIAH Who did the slaying?

JOEL Doeg, the Edomite. There was no other would do it.

ABIAH Did you *see*?

JOEL I saw Ahimelech fall. Then I fled. As I fled I heard the slaying – go on. There was one that escaped and fled with me – the only one. We parted – well for me! For hard after *him* goes death. . . What about our father? Does he live still?

ABIAH Only just; but – not for long.

JOEL 'Twere well he should not. 'Tis better he should die ere the vengeance of Saul fall on him.

ABIAH Would he dare?

JOEL One so mad will dare anything . . . Abiah, if Saul slays him, he will slay us also. Are you going to wait for that?

ABIAH We can't leave him to die alone, Joel.

JOEL What good will it do that we should die also? 'Tis to this he has brought us. 'Tis his doing . . . Who now is with him?

ABIAH Old Caleb; the only one left, now that Jasher has gone.

JOEL Is not one enough? What more can we do. When

Saul finds me gone, he will send after me. *I have no call to be here. Our father sent me from him. You he kept.*

ABIAH Of late he has been asking for you. 'Twas but yesterday he sent for you to return.

JOEL Why – having cast me off?

ABIAH The reasons of a dying man are hard to know, Joel . . .

(But already JOEL is making ready to go.)

Nay, will you not see him before you go?

JOEL What good? He does not know that I am here. And, why should I wait? Saul's messengers may soon be here . . . I'm going, Abiah.

ABIAH Maybe that is wise.

JOEL Farewell, Abiah – *farewell.*

(He goes. That last word was said with so ominous a meaning that Abiah is moved by it. He feels very much alone. Fear takes hold of him. At the sound of galloping of hoofs he starts; but they are going, not coming. He has yet time to save himself.)

ABIAH Aye, what use? What use? Is not one enough?

(He looks out.)

Truly a dark night!

(He wraps himself hurriedly in a cloak, puts out the light, and goes, leaving the door wide. CALEB enters.)

CALEB My lord, my lord! He calls for you!

(Samuel's voice is heard faintly calling for Abiah.

CALEB sees ABIAH running away.)

He's gone. He has left me alone!

SAMUEL *(His voice)* The curse! The curse! Take it from me!

(CALEB is seized with panic. He wavers between fear and faithfulness. A cry from Samuel finishes him. He runs away. SAMUEL is alone. The WISE WOMAN comes slowly in. As she crosses to the inner room, she sings in a low voice:)

WOMAN Rat-a-tat-tat! 'Twas a rat in the house,
That wanted to kill the old grey mouse.

But the old grey mouse, for all that,
Has come to see the death of the rat.

(As she reaches the inner room, the voice of SAMUEL is heard calling 'Abiah . . . Joel'. The stage darkens: the scene changes. SAMUEL is seen lying on his bed, half-conscious. With twitching hands he clutches at the bed-clothes. The WISE WOMAN enters, stands looking at him, and speaks:)

WOMAN The old man is full of sorrow,
 Here to-day, and gone to-morrow.
 Kings come up, and Judges go down;
 All alike when the Gods frown.

SAMUEL Who's there? . . . My sons, where are you? . . .
They've left me – alone!

WOMAN Aye! alone – all alone, at last.

(Hearing the voice he most fears, SAMUEL starts to full consciousness.)

SAMUEL Woman, what brings you here?

WOMAN You brought me. I've a word for you, 'twill be good
for you to hear. Will you hear it? . . . or will you have it not
said?

SAMUEL Speak.

(She sits down by him.)

WOMAN You asked me once, Samuel, whether I could put a
curse upon a man; and I answered, 'He puts it upon himself'.
Aye, it's your own curse that's upon you now, Samuel. For
though you still live, all your power has gone from you.
Who cares for you now? Oh, yes; you thought to break Saul
– to do it, you broke Israel. What good has it done you?
Over Saul's head you anointed David to be King. You won't
live to see David King – you wont, Samuel. Has David come
back to you for a last blessing? No. David has fled away from
Saul, and gone to give service to the foes of Israel – to Achish,
King of Gath. Aye, you've been a sore trouble to Saul – the
two of you. And I helped you to do it when Saul became my
enemy. *Your* doing, Samuel; you didn't break your oath

to me, eh? You set Saul to do it for you. I know it now.
SAMUEL Oh, cease, cease, Woman, from troubling me! Let me die in peace.

WOMAN Peace! What peace have you given to Israel? David was Saul's servant, his friend. Saul loved and trusted him. But behind Saul's back you anointed David to be King. Did David tell Saul? No; Saul was not to know. So at your bidding David became a traitor to his King. For if Saul *was* truly the Lord's Anointed – what was David? Was he the Lord's, or was he only Samuel's? Who can tell? A prophet can always speak the 'Word of the Lord' as seems good to him; but we've only *his* word for it. And if there be evil in his heart, the word he speaks will be evil also. And *your* heart was evil.

SAMUEL Go, Woman, go from me! You have cursed my life from the day when first I hearkened to you, and took your counsel for the sign, and did not wait for the Lord. You took the Word of the Lord from me – tempting me; and I heard His Voice no more. Though I called upon Him, He heard me not.

WOMAN Call on Him again, Samuel! Make thy peace with Saul, and maybe He will yet hear thee.

SAMUEL I will *not* make peace with Saul.

WOMAN Therefore has this come to pass; that because you also made Ahimelech and the Priests of the Tabernacle to conspire with you for David against Saul, therefore has Saul slain them. The Priests are dead, Samuel.

SAMUEL The Priests are dead!

WOMAN Your doing, Samuel. So now is Israel broken and divided, because Samuel loved himself more than he loved Israel, and was wroth when power was taken from him and given to another.

SAMUEL Ah! God, why hast Thou made me live to see this day?

WOMAN For the better knowing of thyself, Samuel, and of the man thou art.

SAMUEL Oh, God, send down Thy curse upon this Woman, whose life I spared, when I should have slain.

WOMAN You did your best, Samuel, you did your best. 'Twas a fine oath you took that day – took and kept; eh, Samuel? – that I should live to *your* life's end – and further – if it were God's will. Well, it has been – God's will. Now die! and your God – go with you.

(She turns to go.)

Rat-a-tat-tat! 'Twas a rat in the house,
That wanted to kill the old grey mouse.
But the old grey mouse, for all that,
Has lived to see the death of the rat!

(She goes out.)

SAMUEL *(feebly)* Help, help! Joel, Abiah! My sons, where are you? Oh, God, Thou hast emptied me out, and cast me away; and there is none left to succour me – none to regard me. Abiah! . . . Abiah! . . . Joel!

(He goes on calling. Slowly the curtain falls.)

ACT IV

SCENE 3

The WISE WOMAN of Endor's house is built against a wall of rock, which gives it the appearance of a cave. In a hollow of the rock is a fire. She sits bent over it, stirring a pot. From outside comes the sound of wind and rain. As she stirs the pot, she croons a song:

WISE WOMAN Rain and wind, wind and rain,
Fall and blow, fast or slow,
Hours, and days, and years go:
None of them ever comes back again.

(A SHEPHERD LAD enters. He has a sack over his head as a cover from the rain.)

SHEPHERD Old One, have you heard? Did you know?

WOMAN Know what?

SHEPHERD Away yonder there's going to be a battle.

WOMAN Aye, aye, surely. There'll always be battles so long as there's men left to fight them.

SHEPHERD Ah! There's the Wise One talking!

WOMAN One doesn't need to be wise to know that. What's this one about? Who are they fighting?

SHEPHERD The Philistines. King Saul, with ten thousand or more, is camped yonder on Mount Gilboa; and the Philistines are coming up against them, with a bigger army – two to his one, so they say.

WOMAN Aye, like enough – now that Israel is divided, some being for David; others for Saul.

SHEPHERD Which are you for, Wise One?

WOMAN Neither. What use would I be to either of them? As for Saul – he would have had my life long ago, could he have found me. Why should I help him?

SHEPHERD Isn't he the Lord's Anointed, Gammer?

WOMAN He was – once on a time. But when there's two Lord's Anointed, who's to say which is the true one? Samuel's doing, that was. What for? Who knows? – now that the old Grey-beard is dead.

SHEPHERD He was a great Prophet of the Lord, wasn't he?

WOMAN Aye; of *his* Lord he was. Well and truly did he prophesy for *Him* – both of 'em dead now.

SHEPHERD But a God can't die, Gammer!

WOMAN Can't he? There's many Gods'll die yet – when men cease to believe in 'em . . . Here! You'd better get home. This storm's going to be worse.

SHEPHERD You don't mind being here all alone, Gammer, miles from anywhere?

WOMAN I'm never alone. Off with you!

(*He goes.*)

WOMAN No; never alone, while I've a mind to remember.

(*She sings.*)

Wind and rain, hail and snow,
The hours, the days, and the years go.

The past is past, and wishing is vain:
The dead shall never come back again.

Aye! Dead – I've outlived you, Samuel.

(There comes knocking, and a voice calling.)

VOICE Ho! Is anyone within?

(She gets up, goes slowly to the door, and opens it. SAUL enters, cloaked and hooded, so that his face is hidden.)

WOMAN Who are you? What do you want – here?

SAUL Shelter from this night of storm, and the wrath of Heaven.

WOMAN I can give you shelter from the night: but I cannot shelter you from the wrath of Heaven . . . Sit down, and warm yourself . . . What brings you here of all places – and to me?

SAUL Are you not that one whom men call the Wise Woman of Endor?

WOMAN Was it that which brought you?

SAUL Of a truth, yes. I have come because men say you are wise.

WOMAN Not now. Such I was once, but my wisdom has gone from me.

SAUL Do not lie, Woman. If God ever gave you wisdom, you have it still.

WOMAN God? What God gave me put me in peril of my life . . . to be taken from me if I used it. Wise? What is it to be wise? Here – here's food for you.

(She puts a bowl into his hands.)

SAUL To have knowledge of hidden things – that surely is to be wise.

WOMAN One may have knowledge – and use it foolishly. Where men are fools, 'tis better to be silent.

SAUL If you have knowledge, and do not speak it – of what use can it be?

WOMAN Had I not been silent these many years, I would have been dead. Because I was wise, the King, who feared Samuel, feared me also. Had Saul's men found me out they would have slain me. Aye, many of us has he harried and

slain, that for their wisdom were called witches; I only am left. Let me die in peace. Ask me nothing.

SAUL Have no fear of King Saul, Woman. He has no wish to harm thee now, or to take thy life from thee.

WOMAN How will you make me sure of that?

SAUL By my own head, and the King's, I swear it.

WOMAN Oh, if but a while ago I could have used my wisdom that has been shut up in me all these years, I might have saved Israel – and the King also.

SAUL From what?

WOMAN From the curse of one that is dead – but in the evil that he did lives still.

SAUL (*startled*) Truly, thou has said it: for that am I come.

WOMAN (*suspiciously*) Did the King send thee?

SAUL There was no need for the King to *send* me. This matter concerns me – alone.

WOMAN Speak, then! What wouldst thou?

SAUL Woman, canst thou raise up the dead?

WOMAN The dead? I know not. They raise themselves, if there be anything left of them. If not, it is only their shadows that we see. Aye, if they have ears to hear a voice calling to them, they come. If they hear it not, they come *not*. Whom of the dead dost thou seek?

SAUL One that was mine enemy, and devised mischief against me.

WOMAN Thine enemy, eh? Wherefore?

SAUL Because I took from him that which he loved more than life – his power over others – therefore he put his curse on me, hated me, and went about to destroy me.

WOMAN Well; if his hate has gone with him, he will not come back to bless thee. Why dost thou seek him? Has he not cursed thee enough?

SAUL I would know whether he has power yet to curse me to my end. For now things go hard with me, and I am in sore straits because of him. Surely – if the dead *are* dead, his curse should not be on me now. Call him, so that I may know.

WOMAN His name?

SAUL Samuel.

WOMAN Nay, who art thou that seekest after Samuel that is dead? – Thy name?

SAUL Call him. Bid him speak: he will tell thee my name. So shall I know that thou art wise.

WOMAN I would know better first whether it were well that I should be – wise for thee. Show me thy hand.

(She takes Saul's hand, and studies it.)

Aye! 'Tis the hand of an honest man that has been crossed by evil . . . simple, truthful . . . a man of power . . . one having authority.

(She starts.)

Show me thy face!

(He turns his head away.)

Why dost thou hide thy face from me? What dost thou fear?

(He turns back and faces her.)

Ah! It is the King! Surely this is an ill thing thou hast done – to lure me to my death!

SAUL Have no fear of me; I came not here to slay thee. Nay; nor was it of my own will that I ever sought thy life. It was Samuel's bidding.

WOMAN I should have known it! I should have known it! The oath which Samuel took to spare my life, he set thee to break for him. Aye, truly! That was Samuel!

SAUL Call him to me – that I may know the truth.

WOMAN What truth, living or dead, wilt thou get from Samuel?

SAUL His spirit haunts me.

WOMAN An evil spirit – a lying spirit. What wouldst thou ask of him?

SAUL This only: whether, after he has slain me, he will cease to divide Israel. To know that, ere I die, would be well.

WOMAN So . . . thou fearest him still? Well, I can show him to thee; for that which is in a man's mind I can make him see. But the dead are dead: no wisdom comes from them; only

that which thou hast in thine own mind concerning them – neither more nor less. In man's fear of evil lies the power of evil. Fear him no more, and Samuel shall depart from thee into death; and his curse will go with him like an evil dream when a man awakes out of sleep.

SAUL I dream still; and in my dream my fear of him is great. Call him!

WOMAN Well, thou shalt see thy fear! If thou fear him enough, he will come to thee . . . Call! . . . Call 'Samuel'!

SAUL Samuel!

(There is a single faint echo: then a long pause.)

WOMAN So heavily he sleeps. Call louder!

SAUL *(louder)* Samuel!

(Two echoes die faintly away.)

WOMAN He hears thee not; or comes not to thy call. I will call for thee. He shall hear *me*. Samuel! Wake! Wake! Samuel!

(The echoes that follow go on, and multiply, as though other voices were taking up the call.)

Aye, aye! The dead awake. Now through the House of Death goes the cry . . . Is he so far away? Hark! They are still calling him . . . Nay, here he comes.

(At that coming from the other world, the fire of the hearth sinks down and dies. In the hollow of the rock, surrounded by a dull red light, the ghost of SAMUEL appears. SAUL utters a cry of terror, and falls senseless to the ground.)

SAMUEL What power is it that calls me?

WOMAN The powers of that oath which you broke, Samuel – to her that gave you the sign of the wrath of Heaven – to whom you promised life, and sent death . . . The old grey mouse is still alive, Samuel. The rat is dead.

(SAMUEL makes a gesture, and opens his mouth to speak.)

Shut thy mouth! My power is upon thee! Be dumb! Now will I take thy curse from one that was thy better. He shall fear thee no more.

(She turns to SAUL, and raises him to his feet.)

Nay, nay, this is no place for a King to lie! Stand up, man, and look thine enemy in the face — what is left of him. Yonder stands the man that made me your enemy — you mine. You sought my life; I sought yours. Came a day when he took counsel of me for your destruction; and when my counsel seemed good to him, he called it the Word of the Lord.

(SAUL raises his head, and sees the ghost of SAMUEL. Slowly he masters his fear and speaks.)

SAUL Aye: there I see him; 'tis the old Samuel; death has not changed him . . . He looks at me; he does not speak . . . Speak, Samuel! I am Saul.

(Behind his back the WISE WOMAN raises her hand in a gesture of command. SAMUEL, about to speak, stays dumb.)

WOMAN He does not hear thee, or see thee. This that thou seest is but the face of thy fear. Let it trouble thee no more. They that did evil in their lives, when they die, they die — having neither ears, nor eyes, nor voices; nor is any understanding of life left in them. They are dead; and what thou seest here is but a mist rising from the grave, a shadow of the life that is gone. Thy reproaches reach him not, neither does he know to what pass thou art come through the evil he devised for thee. He remembers no more what he did to thee, nor why he was thine enemy. To this end has he come . . . Go thy way, Saul! Put off thy fear of the curse he laid on thee, and thou are free from Samuel.

SAUL Because of him, I go now to my death.

WOMAN We all go to our death—some day. Whether thy death be to-day, or to-morrow, or the day after, what matters it? Die as a King should die, and thy reward shall be with thee. And thy name shall be had in honour hereafter when men tell of thee . . . See now, he fades away before thine eyes; and thy mind also is free of him, because thou fearest him no more. Thou art still Saul: and Samuel is nothing but a name.

(The ghost of Samuel grows dim; but does not quite vanish.)

SAUL O Woman, thou hast taught me wisdom, and given me strength. I came to thee in fear. Without fear I go to my death.

WOMAN Aye, now truly thou art thyself again; and the evil spirit troubleth thee no more. Go thy way: yonder is storm; but in the Heavens there is no wrath. Farewell . . . Saul!

(SAUL goes. She stands at the open door looking after him. As she comes back she sees the ghost of Samuel; he also is looking after SAUL, watching his departure.)

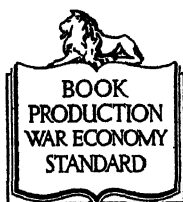
What? Still hungry for that which thou hast lost? I have taken Saul from thee; he fears thee no more. Aye, there he goes – the better man whom thou hast slain. There is no blood on thy hands, but there is blood on thy heart. Thou slewest him – not with sword, but with hatred and jealousy, because he took over the power of the Kingdom, and ruled Israel well. I told him that thou wast nothing, and sent him away a free man, no longer fearing thee. But thou canst still hear *my* voice, and my word . . . Dead rat! Get back to your hole!

(As she speaks Samuel's ghost changes colour; all semblance of life goes out of it; it takes on the hues of death and corruption, and fades slowly away.)

EPILOGUE

JASHER I am Jasher, the writer of history, servant of my lord Samuel. What he bade me write I wrote for him in his books. What he did not bid me write I wrote in my own book, the Book of Jasher. But after that Samuel was dead, my own book was taken from me, because there was truth in it which was not to be told. I served Samuel, and feared him; but I loved Saul. Now Samuel is dead, and Saul is dead also, Saul whom Samuel slew, dividing the Kingdom against him. Ye Mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain upon you, neither fields of offering. For there the shield of the mighty

was vilely cast away – the shield of Saul as though he had not been anointed with oil. Ye daughters of Israel weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet with other delights, who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of War perished. Also he taught them the use of the bow. Behold, it is written in the Book of Jasher.



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